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TIP TOP WEEKLY

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FOR THE AMERICAN YOUTH

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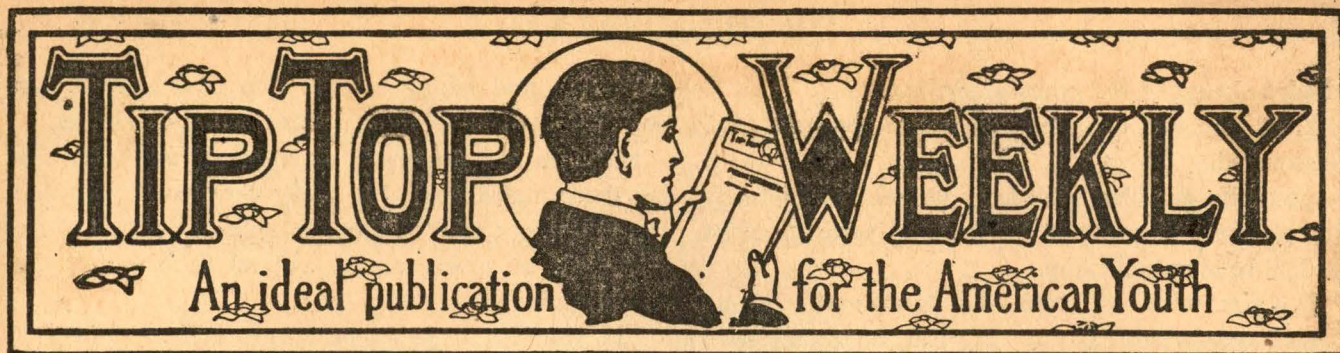
Price, Five Cents

FRANK MERRIWELL'S TREASURE GUARD

OR
THE DEFENDERS
OF THE
PAY TRAIN



Frank held the throttle wide open as they swept round a sharp curve at hair-lifting speed.
Suddenly they came in full view of the besieged pay car.



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Frank Merriwell's Treasure Guard;

OR,

The Defenders of the Pay Train.

By BURT L. STANDISH.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTIVE AND THE TRAITOR.

"Pedro, old comrade," said the captive, who was leisurely stretched on a couch in the prison-like room of Don Juan Espinazo's hacienda; "Pedro, have you a cigarette? I'm dying for a whiff."

The young Mexican, who had just brought the prisoner his evening meal, and placed it on a little wicker table, flushed a bit as Tom Stockton called him "comrade." In a way, he was a good-looking young chap, this Mexican, dandified in appearance, with his slashed trousers, silver-buttoned jacket, and gay sash. His little, dark mustache curled up at the corners, and about him there was an appearance of self-satisfaction and vanity.

"I have papers and tobacco, chief," he murmured.

"That will do very well," half yawned the blond

man on the couch, exposing the tips of his pointed teeth in a gentle smile. "What time is it, my boy? I was fast asleep when you unlocked the door, and entered."

"The evening has passed, and night is here," answered Pedro, as he passed the cigarette papers and tobacco to the man.

Stockton's long, slim, supple fingers deftly formed a cigarette, and hung it lightly on his moistened lower lip.

Pedro struck a match, and held it for the captive.

"Thanks, old comrade," murmured the gambler. "It seems like old times. You always were a fine fellow, Pedro, my lad. I took a great fancy to you. But you've been too easily influenced, boy. A woman's smile turned your head. When you are older you'll understand them better—and trust them less."

Pedro shrugged his graceful shoulders.

"Most men find one whom they can always trust," he answered.

Again the gambler smiled, as he bolstered himself with cushions, seeming in no haste to taste the food that had been brought him.

"Do you think so, lad?" he murmured. "Most youths have the same fancy. It's too bad to undeceive them, but time does it for all. The hour will come when your eyes will be opened and you'll trust no longer. Do you know what they think of doing with me, Pedro?"

"They take you away in the morning, chief. You have made much trouble for these railroad men, and Señor Merriwell proposes to deliver you over to them."

"How much were you paid by this Merriwell for the assistance you rendered him?"

Pedro looked confused.

"What assistance, chief?" he asked, with a pretense of innocence.

"There, there, boy! Don't try that with me! I tell you I like you still, although you made one serious mistake. I know you aided Merriwell and Gallup to escape from my clutches. I know why you did so. Conchita was behind it all. You are in love with her, boy. But, mark what I have said, sometime the scales will fall from your eyes."

A flush of anger mantled the young Mexican's cheeks.

"Beware, señor," he said warmly. "Have a care that you say nothing bad of Conchita in my presence."

Stockton took a long, lazy pull at the cigarette.

"Conchita is very beautiful," he said. "Her eyes are bewitching, and they've worked their spell on you, my lad. I can't wonder at it. Ah, such eyes as your señoriats have! No wonder they so easily deceive you poor, trusting chaps. You're a handsome boy, Pedro; but have you ever noticed how your girls take a fancy to the young Americans who come down here? Occasionally they capture one of them. Teresa, Conchita's cousin, is married to Gallup. They seem very devoted. Conchita has seen this, and who can say that, deep down in her heart, she has not had a longing to win the affections of some other American? Now, hold on, Pedro, lad! Don't get excited. Have you ever noticed what a really fine specimen of manhood this Merriwell is? Surely you must confess that he is a handsome fellow. Do you think Conchita is blind to that fact?"

"*Caramba!*" snarled Pedro, suddenly flashing forth

a dagger, and taking a long step that brought him poised above the recumbent figure of the prisoner.

Stockton did not move as much as a finger. He lay there undisturbed, his steely eyes looking straight into the angry orbs of the man with the knife. After a moment he spoke calmly, without the slightest flutter in his voice.

"If you do it, you'll be sorry, Pedro. I'm your best friend. Yes, boy, even though you've been deluded into betraying me, I'm still your friend."

"You've cast a slur on my Conchita!" hissed Pedro.

"Oh, no, lad; you're mistaken. I'm trying to open your eyes. How can you blame the girl if she admires Merriwell?"

"It's a lie!"

"You think so now, but consider the matter. Her brother was one of Mendez's men, and, therefore, trusted by me. Until we brought those two Americans to the old ranch, and Conchita saw them prisoners in our hands, she was ever loyal and true. What wrought the wonderful change in her?—for I know she was mainly instrumental in aiding them to escape. The change came swiftly, suddenly, and without warning. She risked everything to set them free. She urged you by the love you professed for her to aid her, and you succumbed to her entreaties. Think it over, Pedro. What was the cause?"

"She is Teresa's cousin, and Teresa is the wife of Gallup."

"Quite true; yet I'm sure it was not for Gallup's sake that she induced you to betray me. Gallup was in no particular danger. I had never threatened him with anything more than captivity for a time. When I had completed my plans and operations I meant to set him free. Conchita knew this. Is it natural that she should risk her own life and yours in an effort to free him at once?"

"On the other hand, she knew Merriwell was in great danger. She was present when Merriwell and I played cards, the stake being his life. He won, and therefore I spared him for the time. Still, it is likely Conchita believed the respite temporary, and fancied I would put him out of the way later. Knowing and fearing this, she aided him to slip through my fingers.

"As further proof of what I claim, you must remember that her brother was one of us. In betraying me, she likewise betrayed her own brother. She came here to Don Juan Espinazo's home, and here she saw Merriwell gather a band of men to return for the purpose of attacking us. Don't forget that she knew her brother was with us, and that his peril would be

great. She knew he might be slain. I believe he escaped during the battle, but certainly he can give no thanks for his escape to his sister."

The young Mexican was all aquiver now, and his face betrayed the fact that he was torn and tortured by doubt.

"Pedro, my lad," continued the prisoner, "not for the world would I deceive you. I'm sorry for you. The men who once trusted you now know of your treachery, and there is no doubt that they have registered a vow to kill you. From this time onward you'll live in constant peril. Some day, some night, some fatal moment one of those men will strike, and your life will end like that"—the gambler snapped his fingers as he spoke.

All the color was gone from the listener's face, and he shrugged his shoulders with a shivering movement as Stockton's fingers cracked.

"It was all for my Conchita!" he muttered hoarsely.

"Poor lad, poor, deluded boy! Pedro, I alone can save you from your fate. Were I to go to your comrades, and tell them you had aided me to escape, tell them you had been led into your action through mistake, tell them your heart was still loyal and faithful, they would believe me, and you would be spared."

"But you can't do that," said Pedro; "you're a prisoner, and Señor Merriwell will deliver you over to the railroad builders."

"If he has his way, he will. This man has deceived Conchita, Pedro. Why, lad, he's married. She doesn't know it. You see, if he had told her, he could not have led her into planning for his escape. What do you think of this fine American who has deceived your sweetheart? When she knows the truth, she'll hate him, and regret what she has done."

"He is mareed? He is mareed?" palpitated Pedro. "Conchita does not know it? *Si, si, Señor Chief*, when she does know, she weel hate heem. I hate heem now! I could keel him!"

"Don't lift your voice, my boy. Some one might be listening at that door. They trust you as my guard. You carry the keys. Why, lad, though I'm an American myself, I confess, with shame, that the men of my country will often resort to the deception of a woman in order to accomplish their ends. It is true in this case. This Merriwell wants the railroad built, as it will open up his mine, and add to his riches. There are others who don't want the railroad finished. Never mind who they are. I know them. They have money, and plenty of it. By them I am paid to make trouble for the railroad constructors. They have promised

me much money if I defeat the project, and cause the company to cease construction. Even the government will not interfere with me in my operations, although I have been told that I will be given no apparent support or encouragement.

"Pedro, if I were to escape from this place to-night, I could again gather the scattered ones of the band, could add other members, and, in the end, I would stop that railroad. I would receive the money promised me. If any one were to give me valuable assistance now, in my hour of need, I would not forget that person. He would be well rewarded by me. I would make him rich for life. Supposing you were the one to do it, Pedro, you could marry Conchita, and have no worry for the future. Just think it over, my boy. As I have said, you are the trusted guard, and you hold the keys to that door. When you leave this room, you might pretend to lock this door. By accident, you might leave it unlocked. Should such a thing happen, I think I could find an opportunity to slip out without being observed. The old don has plenty of horses, and I can ride the worst bronco that ever bucked. Let me stand free to-night, outside the walls of this building, and Merriwell will see no more of me until he faces me in the struggle which will mean his complete defeat."

Suddenly the gambler sat up, and rose to his feet. Looking straight into the Mexican's eyes, he said:

"Pedro, you leave the door unlocked when you go out. They'll never know it was not a mistake. The next time we meet, I'll pay you a thousand dollars. When the railroad company is ruined, I'll give you enough more to make you rich. What do you say, Pedro?"

The Mexican was shaking like a leaf. Apparently he was wavering, when, from somewhere outside the room, a musical voice called his name.

"It's Conchita!" he hissed. "I must go, Señor Chief. Leesen when I have closed the door, and you weel know my answer."

With a yawn that ended in a slight smile of triumph, Stockton sat down at the table, and prepared to eat.

Noiselessly Pedro glided from the room. The door closed behind him. There was a fumbling of the key in the lock, but the keen ear of that captive knew the key had not been turned.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGER IN QUIJANO.

In the purple dusk of twilight a man came riding along the old post-road from the east, and entered Quijano, a little town of a dozen adobe huts and one American saloon.

Quijano had prospects. The surveyed line of the Central Sonora touched it, and it was believed that the coming of the railroad would quicken this sleeping little hamlet into life. Hence the American saloon. Rube Smith, the enterprising proprietor, fancied he saw an opportunity to make good money in Quijano while the railroad was pushing past, and possibly after that.

Smith had leased a square adobe building, brought a stock of liquors into the town, and opened up his bar. He called the place the "Gray Dove."

In front of the Gray Dove the horseman dismounted, signaling to a barefooted Mexican boy, who came forward languidly, a sleepy look in his limpid eyes.

"Here, boy," said the man, "take care of my horse. I see there are sheds yonder. Have the beast watered and fed. Here's something for you." He pressed a piece of money into the hand of the sleepy lad, who suddenly awoke, as he saw this token of the stranger's generosity.

"*Si, señor, si, si!*" he cried, eagerly, in a soft voice. "I will see that the horse has the very good care, señor."

The man brushed his soft, blond mustache, shook some of the dust from his shoulders, and sauntered into the saloon.

"Howdy, partner," greeted Rube Smith, surveying the newcomer with interest. "I reckon you're Yank, and you're the first I've seen in a week. Make yer-self ter hum. I'll have these dratted lights lit in a minute."

"Don't hasten on my account," said the stranger, as he glanced around the place, and then leaned an elbow on the bar.

In one corner, on a rough bench, was huddled a queer figure, wrapped in an old red blanket. This blanket hid its owner to the eyebrows. Above that point there was a crown of long, straight black hair, from which a ragged feather upreared itself.

"I see you have a lodger," observed the newcomer, with a light laugh. "Do you permit that?"

"Oh, everything goes, partner, when a man spends his money with me. That old Injun came hoofin' it in here two hours ago, purty nigh petered. He's all used up with the rheumatiz, besides being deaf and

half blind. I didn't reckon he'd have the price of a snifter about him, but I'll be dinged if he didn't buy seven drinks in rapid concussion, and he stowed the whole of them away under his belt."

"No wonder he's sleeping," smiled the man at the bar. "When you get around to it, I think I'll follow his example, and have a drink myself."

Having lighted two suspended oil lamps, Smith hastened round behind the bar, ready to serve the customer.

"What'll you have, sir?" he asked.

"Well, I don't suppose it makes much difference. If I call for rum, whisky, brandy, or any old thing of that sort, I suppose I'll be served out of one bottle."

"Not on yer life!" rather indignantly denied the proprietor of the Gray Dove. "I've got all the different brands of stuff you name, and I can give you what you want, if you don't git too proud and perticeler. Ain't gut no Mumm's Extra Dry, nor nothin' like that."

"Well, give me your best whisky."

"Here she am," said Smith, as he placed a bottle and glasses on the bar. "You're Yank, so pour your own drink. It wouldn't do with these greasers. I do the pouring myself, and they git jest what they pay for, not a dinged bit more. Why, if I should let them do the pouring, they'd drink brimmers every go."

"That's the way with greasers," nodded the stranger, as he poured a medium drink. "Have one with me, sir?"

"Scuse me," said Smith; "I never tech the stuff."

"Indeed, that's remarkable. Do you mean to say that you don't drink anything?"

"Nothing stronger than coffee. Never monkey with bug-juice. I've had my turn at that, and quit it long ago. It disagrees with me most remarkable. If I take a nip, I want two more, and, when I get two more, I am inclined to drink up all there is. Found I couldn't indulge at all, and so I says to myself: 'Rube, you derved old fool, you've got to let it alone.' Since then I've never wet my tongue with it."

"A most surprising case of determination and self-control. It's strange that a man with such an appetite can handle the stuff as you do, and not break over. It's a genuine pleasure to find a place like this down in this God-forsaken country. Here's to your very good health, sir."

"Drink hearty," said Smith, as the customer lifted the glass, and quaffed its contents at a swallow.

"Didn't expect to find an American doing business in this place," said the stranger.

"I s'pose not. But I kinder figured out that there'd be something in it when the railroad come along. That's what brought me here."

"Have you heard anything new about the railroad lately?"

"Oh, they're having a tough old time laying the rails. There's lots of trouble, and they say the grading is purty nigh at a standstill. A card-sharp from the States is making most of the trouble, according to the report. He's running a game, and selling booze to the greaser laborers. He stands in with a lawless greaser by the name of Mendez, who has a bunch of followers. That is, he did stand in with this Mendez. But there's been reports to-day of a big fight, and I hear Mendez was cut up for planting. They don't seem to know jest what has become of Stockton, which was the name of the card-sharp I mentioned. It's kinder cal'lated that the railroad people have ketched Stockton foul, and there's an idee that they'll hang him to a tree somewhere."

"This is all very interesting information," murmured the man of the blond mustache, smiling the least bit, and showing the tips of white, pointed teeth. "Evidently Stockton bit off more than he could chew."

"They say he met his master in a young feller who has a mine over in the mountains. Um, let me see, what's his name?—er—er—Merrifield? Merriweather? Merriwell?—that's it!"

"It's plain you've heard a lot of interesting gossip recently. Who brought all this information into town?"

"'Sh! 'Tween you and me, I reckon it was some of the greasers who was concerned in the affair. I understand their gibberish some, and I caught enough to know that they had escaped by the skin of their teeth."

"Are they around town now?"

"Why, I judge so. They're—why, here's one of the gents now."

A slender, picturesque young man came sauntering into the saloon. He was a Mexican, and his attire was of the style affected by the gentlemen of the country outside the large cities.

He stopped in his tracks, and his jaw dropped a bit as he saw the man at the bar. This man lifted his right hand, as if to stroke his mustache with an habitual movement, but quickly pressed his fingers to his lips in a signal that the Mexican could not fail to understand.

"Hey, Tony!" called Rube Smith; "here's a gent

what's askin' some questions about the railroad affairs. Mebbe you can tell him more than I ken."

"It will be my pleasure to do so," murmured Tony. "What is it you wish to know, señor?"

"Have a drink with me, Tony?" invited the man at the bar. "My name is Thompson."

"You are very kind, Señor Thompson. I shall be honored, señor."

"Do you mind, proprietor," said the American, "if we sit yonder at that table? I don't think we'll disturb your sleeping lodger. The seven drinks he stowed away will keep him quiet for awhile."

"Sit right down at the table, gents, and I'll serve yer," said Smith.

"Whisky for me," said the American. "I presume Tony will take mescal. Am I right, Tony?"

"Quite right, Señor Thompson," bowed the young Mexican.

Together they sat down at the table, and between them a few whispered words passed while the proprietor was bringing the drinks.

"Good boy, Tony!" said the American. "You caught on promptly, and did your part."

"But I came very near betraying you, Señor Stockton," admitted Tony. "It was the most wonderful surprise, for I feared you had been slain."

"Oh, far from that," was the retort. "I'm very much alive, as the railroad people are due to learn."

CHAPTER III.

THE INDIAN AWAKES.

The drinks being served, Stockton and Tony sat there at the table, chatting in low, murmuring tones. They lighted their cigarettes, and smoked, as they talked.

Once the Mexican turned, and surveyed the sleeping Indian with a slight touch of uneasiness.

"Never mind him," said the gambler. "The boss of the place says he has seven drinks in him, and he's dead to the world. Besides that, he's deaf and half blind."

"Then it is all right, señor," murmured Tony. "I do not wish to be incautious, for lack of caution has cost many a man dear."

"Quite right, my boy," agreed the gambler. "It cost us dear not so long ago. Had we taken the alarm when that cursed girl helped those two fellows to escape, we'd not have remained at the old ranch until Merriwell returned with a bunch of men, and cleaned us out. That was a big mistake on our part."

"It was an error most grave," said Tony. "We know it now. It cost Señor Mendez his life, for Maro, his enemy, killed him in the courtyard."

"I'm very sorry," declared Stockton. "Mendez was a good man, and he could be relied on. How many of the boys escaped?"

"Oh, a few got away unharmed, señor. They have sworn to be avenged. They wait the day when they shall find Pedro, the traitor."

"Pedro, the fool!" sneered Stockton. "Why, I pulled the wool over his eyes easily. He's a simple chap to deceive. Only for Pedro, I might still be in the hands of Merriwell. They had me at old Espinazo's ranch, and Pedro was my guard and attendant. He brought me my food. I studied out a plan, and it worked handsomely with him. I convinced him that his sweetheart had fallen in love with this Merriwell, and was ready to betray him, even as she was led to betray us. He believed me. On top of this, I made him understand his danger from the boys who had escaped being slain by Maro's gang. I suggested that I was the only one who could intercede for him. I likewise promised him money, and hinted that the only way in which he could right himself was for him to forget to lock my door. He forgot."

"And you escaped alone, señor?"

"Sure. I let no grass grow under my feet. I sneaked out of that room, found a saddle and bridle, caught a horse, and got away. It was none too soon, either; for, ere I was beyond hearing, I heard indications at the ranch that my escape had been discovered. For two nights and two days I've been busy dodging trailers. Merriwell followed me, and he's worse than a redskin on the trail. I resorted to all sorts of tricks to baffle him, but he seemed to see through them all, until to-day. At last I must have thrown him off the track. Either that, or he gave up in disgust. When satisfied that I had tricked him, I headed for this place, hoping I might find some of the boys here."

"Fortune was with you, señor. Now what is it that you will do?"

"I propose to make it hotter than ever for the railroad people, but I shall give the greater part of my attention to this Merriwell. No man ever bothered me as this fellow has and escaped me. We shall meet again, and next time I shall be complete master of the situation, and retain my mastery, too."

"I have no doubt that it is so, señor. But the band is scattered. You will need assistance."

"I shall need all the assistance I can get, and the

boys must be brought together. We must find new recruits. I shall look for your aid, Tony. I think I can depend on you."

"You can, señor, in truth."

"I'm certain you're an honest fellow, Tony, and you shall be well paid if you stick by me. In the first place, I need some money. Have you any about you?"

"No much, señor—not more than a hundred dollars."

Stockton shrugged his shoulders.

"A hundred isn't much good," he said.

"But you know where the loot from the pay-train is hidden," whispered the Mexican, his eyes glittering.

Stockton surveyed his companion a moment in silence.

"Yes, I know," he nodded. "It's not such a great distance from this town, either. I've got the most of it there. Of course, I had to pay the boys, as I agreed, but the bulk of that money is safely stored away. I might go after it, and get what I want, but I'd run the risk of being followed, and I prefer to keep away for the present. I need a fresh outfit. I want an extra horse. These things cost money, and therefore I must have money right away. I wonder if there are any suckers in town, Tony? If I could run against one or two, I might make a raise. In the meantime, I wish to borrow half of your hundred. You know you can trust me, and I promise to pay it back doubled and redoubled."

Immediately Tony brought forth a purse that jingled with a clinking, musical sound. This he opened, taking from it several gold pieces and some silver, which he pushed toward Stockton.

"Thanks, my boy," said the gambler, as he accepted the coins, and slipped them into his pocket. "This will be quite enough for me to begin operations with, in case I'm able to find the victim. I wonder if they play here?"

"Si, señor," nodded Tony. "They play at this table and the table yonder. I have seen them. Later in the evening there will be visitors, many of them. They will gather here."

"And I may find the sucker I seek among them," muttered the gambler. "In the meantime, Tony, by way of preparation, you and I might play here at the table. Then, if the right sucker comes along, it will be easy to rope him in. Whatever we win or lose between us while playing shall be divided."

"To me it is agreeable," promptly declared the Mexican, for he well knew Stockton's skill at cards.

The proprietor was called, and the gambler politely

made known their wants, and asked for a pack of cards. Smith informed him that he would charge each player a certain sum for the privilege of using the table, and Stockton paid in advance for them both.

They began playing two-handed draw-poker, meanwhile continuing their conversation, in which Merriwell and the railroad troubles were frequently mentioned.

After a time two or three customers came drifting in, and drank at the bar. They also regarded the card-players with passing interest.

Finally the sleeping Indian grunted, and stirred.

"Old Seven Drinks is waking up," smiled Stockton. "It's about time."

The edge of the blanket was lowered a little, and a pair of piercing, beady eyes gazed at them from beneath shaggy, overhanging eyebrows.

"Come, come, chief," said Stockton, "it's time for another drink."

With much grunting and apparent difficulty, the old Indian slowly and stiffly sat up. His face was wrinkled and weatherworn. From his appearance one might have fancied him nearing the century mark in years.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "What white man say 'bout um drink? White man heap much polite."

"Well, evidently you heard that quick enough, even if you are somewhat deaf," said Stockton, with a smile.

"Sometime I hear heap sudden," was the answer. "Sometime can't hear none."

"You don't seem to be bind, either."

"Ugh! Eyesight he trouble Injun much. One day eyesight reach long way off. Next day mebbe no can see at all. Injun heap blowed out. He got rust in him hinges. Hear um squeak."

The old rekskin moved his legs, and cocked one ear in a listening attitude, as if he actually expected to hear his joints creak.

"Well, you're pretty near all in, aren't you, Seven Drinks?" chuckled Stockton.

"What you say? You give um Injun seven drinks more? Ugh! Have um brought quick!" Injun he take um."

"Well, your nerve is all right, if your hinges are rusty," said the gambler. "I rather like nerve, so I'll blow you a drink. I don't suppose you have the price about you. Bring another round, proprietor, and add a geezer for the Injun."

When the drinks were brought, the old redskin

seized his glass with a hand that shook so that there was danger of spilling the liquid.

"Heap much how!" he grunted, as he took the drink at a swallow.

After this, with apparent deep interest, the old man sat and watched them play.

"Much good game!" he grunted. "Heap lot of fun. Injun him learn it some. Mebbe he play?"

"It takes money to play this game," said Stockton. "You don't look like a millionaire."

"Injun him got some money," was the prompt retort. "Mebbe he try um game."

He fumbled beneath his blanket, and unhooked his belt. Opening the belt, he poured forth several pieces of gold in a little heap on the table.

Stockton leaned forward, and stared at the money in astonishment.

"Well, wouldn't that jar you!" he laughed. "I thought the old boy was busted, and here he is loaded with coin."

"Money um good," observed the Indian. "Mebbe you let um redskin play cards, uh?"

"Sure," said the gambler. "Sit right up, Seven Drinks, and get into the game. We'll teach you how it's done."

CHAPTER IV.

"HEAP GOOD GAME."

Among the men who wandered into the saloon was a tall, handsome, finely formed Mexican, with a sprinkling of gray in his hair and mustache. He had the air of a hidalgo. His buckskin jacket was adorned with silver buttons, and his buckskin breeches were slashed along the outer seams. About his waist was a fine red silk sash, and silver spurs jingled at his heels.

With others, this man drew near the card-table, and watched the game with a polite air of interest.

Stockton observed him, and nodded in a friendly manner.

"Perhaps you'd like to sit in with us, señor?" he suggested. "I don't happen to know your name, but you look like a gentleman, and we are playing to amuse ourselves and pass the time."

"The Señor American is very kind," bowed the one invited. "My name is Gonzalez. Unfortunately, I have seldom played the game you are playing. I will watch it. Perhaps I may learn something."

"Our friend, Seven Drinks, doesn't seem to be very familiar with the game!" laughed the gambler; "but

he's doing his best to catch on. You'll find out how it goes, Seven Drinks, old boy!"

"Ugh! Heap good game," said the Indian, who had been permitted to win the first pot and rake in a small amount of money. "Much easy to learn."

Stockton winked at Tony, who lifted a hand to his mouth to hide a smile. They had baited the redskin with that first pot, meaning to clean him out in the end.

It was now the old man's deal. He fumbled over the cards, and made a mistake at the start by giving Stockton three.

"Hold on," said the gambler, "that isn't right. One at a time, Seven Drinks, old boy, and you must let Tony cut the cards."

"Injun he much forgetful. He no seem to remember."

The old fellow gathered up the cards, shuffled them again, and permitted Tony to cut. When he had dealt off four to each one he stopped.

"Keep on," said Stockton. "There's another one due us."

"One-um, two-um, three-um, four-um," counted the redskin, fumbling with his cards. "Oh, must have five-um, uh?"

Slowly he tossed off another card to each one, and they picked up their hands. The cards in the Indian's fingers were quivering, although he seemed to make an effort to hold them still.

"It's like taking money from the baby," said Stockton, speaking in Spanish, to Tony.

"It is, indeed, señor," answered Tony, in the same language.

It was the Mexican's bet, and he started it with a dollar, for he had discovered kings and trays in his hand.

The Indian pawed his hand over until the others grew impatient. Finally he said, "Make um two dollar," and pushed two silver dollars into the pile.

Stockton glanced at Tony, who nodded a bit. Then the gambler pushed out two dollars, and added a five-dollar gold piece as a raise.

Tony made good, and raised another five.

"Heap much bet," said the Indian. "How much um cost now?"

"Ten dollars more," said Stockton.

With apparent reluctance, the Indian added a ten-dollar gold piece to the collection.

"He won't stand another raise," thought Stockton. "We better let it go as it is."

Then he added the five due from him, and called for

three cards, holding up a pair of seven-spots. With some satisfaction, he saw he had secured another seven-spot when the cards were dealt him.

Tony took one, and failed to better his hand.

"How many are you going to have?" asked Stockton, as the Indian placed the pack on the table.

"No want any," was the answer. "Hand it heap good."

"What!" cried the gambler, in surprise. "You haven't made any mistake, have you?"

"No, no. Hand heap good."

"You're sure you're not bluffing?"

"What um be to bluff?"

"You're not trying to fool us?"

"Injun him never fool. Him mean business."

"Well, wouldn't that cramp you!" laughed the gambler. "I'll have to leave it to you, Tony. I'm going to lay my hand."

Tony bet five, and immediately the old Indian made good that five, and raised it ten.

Tony glared at the redskin, and then threw down his hand, face upward, exposing his two pairs.

"It is the luck of the fool who knows nothing of the game," he said angrily. "What have you got?"

"You call um me?"

"No, I don't call, but I would like to see your cards. Of course you don't have to show them, if you don't want to."

"Um don't mind 'bout that. Much good hand. Like to show um."

Then, having raked in the pot, the old redskin lay down a deuce and a five-spot of hearts, a jack of diamonds, a queen of spades, and an ace of clubs.

"Heap fine cards," he said.

A mild burst of laughter rose from the spectators when they saw that hand. As for Stockton, he simply sat back on his chair, and whistled. Tony swore roundly in Spanish.

"I thought you didn't know how to bluff, old Seven Drinks!" cried the gambler.

"No know nothin' 'bout um bluff," protested the winner. "Heap good hand."

"Well, that's the limit!" said Stockton. "I don't think we know how to play this game, Tony. We'll have to take lessons of our redskin friend."

To himself Stockton was saying:

"That will cost the old fool his pile before I'm done with him."

The game continued with varying fortunes for some time. Finally, however, the Indian began to lose, and

it was not long before his small winnings had vanished and some of his own money with them.

"Bimeby," he said, "Injun he get 'nother good hand. Then he win um money all back."

At length, on Stockton's deal, the redskin seemed to get what he desired, for when he was raised on his opening, he promptly came back with another raise.

Now Stockton had learned the run of the cards, and had dealt to suit himself. He had given Tony three ten-spots, but had tossed four kings to the Indian. In his own hand on the deal he took three aces.

There was considerable raising before the draw, the Indian coming back each time, until both Stockton and Tony seemed satisfied to quit.

"How many cards?" asked the gambler, as he picked up the pack and began fingering them with those supple digits.

Tony called for two, and one of the two tossed him was a ten-spot, giving him four in all.

The Indian asked for one card.

"Perhaps he thinks he'll get another king," thought the gambler, laughing inwardly.

When Stockton dealt to himself he deftly slipped another ace from the bottom of the pack, thus making four aces in his hand.

Following this draw, the Indian again started the betting by pushing a ten-dollar gold piece into the pile. Stockton raised him twenty.

Tony made it forty.

The Indian fumbled with his belt, and emptied its remaining contents on the table.

"I make um it a hundred," he said.

In the meantime Stockton had seen another of his friends in the room, and this man he now called.

"Manuel," he said, "I want to borrow some money. How much have you that you can spare?"

"I have this," answered the man addressed, producing a purse.

Stockton quietly opened up his hand, and exposed the four aces to Manuel.

Then he took the purse, and prepared for business.

Tony was quickly frozen out of the game, as he did not possess enough money to stay. He believed, however, that Stockton had the winning hand, and therefore he lay down his four ten-spots without a sigh of regret.

The betting between the gambler and the old Indian was most exciting. Finally the redskin pushed the last dollar into the pile, saying:

"Ain't got no more. Injun have to call um you. What you got so good?"

"I've got the pot," smiled Stockton. "Here are four aces, old Seven Drinks. You can't beat that."

But when he made a move to pull in the money, the redskin promptly called for him to wait.

"Um four aces pretty fine, pretty fine," grunted the old fellow. "Mebbe you like to see what Injun he got?"

"You can't beat four aces, old man!" cried Stockton.

"Mebbe no beat um," was the answer, "but make um go some. You like um looks of these?"

One by one he exposed to view the five, six, seven, eight, and nine-spot of diamonds!

He had a straight flush, which was a higher hand than four aces.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS MEXICAN.

For a moment Tom Stockton, the card-sharp, seemed paralyzed with astonishment. He leaned forward, and stared wonderingly at the cards placed on the table by the old Indian.

"Heap much fine," said the redskin, as he reached out with both hands to scrape in the money.

With a snarl, Stockton checked him.

"Hold on!" cried the card-sharp. "How did you get those cards, you old reprobate?"

"How?" grunted the withered aborigine. "Much easy. You deal um."

"I never dealt you those cards," declared the man, who was known throughout that region as The Wolf. "I'm not a fool, and I never helped anybody beat me at my own game."

"There um cards," persisted the Indian. "Everybody see um. Money mine. You give um cards to me. They win."

"There's something crooked about this!" grated Stockton. "I tell you I'm not a fool, and you didn't win fairly. Wait a minute. Hey! what's this?"

He had leaned, with a sudden movement, in the Indian's direction, seized the blanket, and thrown it open with a shake. From beneath the blanket dropped a number of cards.

"Pick them up, Manuel—pick them up!" cried Stockton. "Let's see what they are!"

The Mexican thus called on quickly gathered the cards from the floor, and spread them on the table, exposing to view four kings.

"I knew it!" laughed the gambler triumphantly. "I

knew what the old fool had! He had the straight-flush hand hidden under his blanket, and he swapped hands. I hold four aces, and the pot is mine. I'm going to take it."

"You no take it!" came in a low, fierce tone from the Indian, as he again made a move to rake in the money.

Quick as a flash, Stockton snapped forth a pistol, and covered the redskin.

"I'm not only going to take that pot," he said, "but I'm going to blow a hole through you, you old sinner! It's the law of the game in this country, if a man is caught cheating. I have the right to shoot you because I caught you."

At this moment something touched Stockton's head, just behind his ear. It was the muzzle of an ivory-handled revolver, gripped in the fingers of Gonzalez, the Mexican, who had softly changed his position until he was directly behind the gambler.

"If I were in your place, señor," purred the soft voice of the man with the ivory-handled weapon, "I wouldn't shoot. If you do, I shall blow the top of your head off."

Stockton hissed forth an exclamation of anger and dismay.

"What do you mean by chipping into this game, you fool?" he palpitated.

Stockton had seated himself with his back toward the wall. There was barely sufficient room between him and the wall for Gonzalez to stand there with comfort. This brought the man facing the entire room, and no person could make a move he did not observe.

"Señor Gambler," said the hidalgo, in the same soft, dulcet tone, "you have been caught in your own trap. This you know very well. You talk of cheating, señor—you! Why, you cheated when you dealt the cards, and you know it."

"It's a lie!" cried Stockton.

"It is the truth, señor. I saw you. How did you know so well what cards the Indian should hold? How did you know so well that you had him beaten?"

"A man can bet his life on four aces any day."

"Ah, but you knew he had four kings. You have said as much. You gave him those four kings, to lead him to bet, in order that you might rob him of his money with the four aces that you had dealt yourself."

"Prove it!"

"I watched, you señor, and I saw everything. I saw you give yourself one ace from the bottom of the pack.

You did the trick deftly, but my eyes were not deceived."

"It's a lie!" again snarled Stockton.

"You know it is the truth, señor. When one rascal tries to cheat another, no one weeps if he is defeated. Put up that pistol, señor, or I shall shoot you through the head. Don't move—don't try to rise. It will mean your instant death."

Something in the voice of the speaker made a slight tremor run over Stockton. He was satisfied that the man would make good his threat. This being the case, with reluctance the gambler lowered his weapon.

"Ugh!" grunted the old redskin. "Greaser man gent; him speak heap true. Old Joe him know what slick card feller do. Old Joe him not such a fool. He watch close all the time. Him know bimeby pretty soon gambler man give Injun much fine hand, but take much better hand himself. Then Injun he have nice little straight flush all ready."

Having made this statement, the old redskin once more reached for the money, and this time he quickly scooped it in, and stowed it away about his person.

For the time being the gambler seemed dazed, and no one save the Indian moved. As for the Indian, he moved swiftly, and with a definite purpose. Even as he disposed of the last of his money, he slipped from his chair, and vanished like a wraith through an open doorway at the rear of the room.

This was too much for Stockton, who had been thinking all the time that he would not permit the old man to get away with the coin.

Regardless of Gonzalez and his threatening pistol, the gambler sprang to his feet with a shout, upsetting the table. Another leap, and he was at the door through which the Indian had vanished.

"Come on, Tony! Come on, Manuel!" he cried fiercely. "Don't let that old fool get away!"

There was a rush toward the door, and several of the Mexicans followed Stockton's lead.

Ten or fifteen minutes later they straggled back into the saloon, the gambler finally returning in search of Gonzalez, whose life he swore he would have.

But the Mexican who had interfered had improved the opportunity to depart. Rube Smith informed Stockton that Gonzalez had sauntered out by the front door shortly after they rushed away in pursuit of the redskin.

Evidently Gonzalez knew his danger in Quijano, for he soon left the town, and struck away into a little valley, where there were many shadows and the silence of the night seemed unbroken, save by his own foot-

falls. He had proceeded nearly a mile, when suddenly he halted, for directly in his path, not fifteen feet away, stood a silent figure.

It was an old Indian, with his arms folded and his red blanket draped around him in a distinctively dignified manner.

For fully a minute the two men stood there in silence, regarding each other.

The redskin was the first to speak.

"How! how!" he grunted, in a friendly manner.

"Heap glad to see greaser man gent."

"*Muchas gracias*," softly murmured the Mexican.

"Ugh!" came from the Indian. "No understand greaser talk. Heap talk much fine United State. Um no stop in town. Um git out much quick."

"I did not think it would be safe for me to linger there," said the Mexican.

"Greaser man gent him heap good feller. Joe make much money, but mebbe he no get it if you not help him."

"I doubt much if you would. In fact, I think you would have been slain."

"Joe him heap grateful. Now we go somewhere, sit down, count money, divvy."

The Mexican smilingly lifted one hand.

"No, no," he protested. "I couldn't think of it."

"Got to think," harshly declared the Indian. "Joe him on the level. He know him friend. He divvy."

"By your own cleverness you defeated the gambler. I have no claim to that money."

Still the obstinate redskin insisted on dividing.

Finally, with a laugh, the Mexican said:

"There is a better way to settle it. Neither of us cares again to appear in Quijano to-night. Together we will seek some secluded spot, make there our camp, and by the firelight I will play poker with you for that money."

"How you do um that if we no divide?" questioned the Indian.

"We will divide," nodded the Mexican. "We'll separate your winnings into two equal amounts, and play until one or the other of us wins the whole of it."

"Much good. Heap fine," came from the redskin. "Come. Injun he know where safe place am."

The old man turned, and his moccasined feet made not the slightest sound as he glided away.

With almost equal silence, the Mexican followed.

The pace set by the Indian was a swift one, despite his complaint that his joints were rusty and his limbs

weary. It took a good man to follow him without panting.

They entered a dark strip of chaparral, through which the redskin seemed to find a natural path, and finally, in a little opening in the heart of the thicket, they came to a halt.

"Joe him got horse and gun pretty near," said the Indian. "Him look out for um. Mebbe greaser gent he wait here."

The Mexican laughed:

"I have likewise a horse near," he said. "I will look after my animal at the same time. We can return to this spot, and meet here."

"Much good," said the redskin, as he vanished into the shadows.

Five minutes later old Joe came into a small, timber-surrounded valley, where he had picketed his horse. As he stepped forth into the valley, where the white moonlight lay softly, he halted suddenly, for before him were two horses. Not only that, but standing silently beside one of them was a man.

That man was Gonzalez, the Mexican!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CHAPARRAL.

The old redskin uttered a grunt of mingled astonishment and chagrin. To him it was not a little surprising, for a brief time past he had left Gonzalez in the chaparral, and supposed the man was waiting there. In some manner the Mexican had reached the valley ahead of him.

"How you git here so quick?" demanded the Indian, with an intonation of wondering resentment.

Gonzalez laughed softly.

"We both started to look after our horses," he said. "Mine was here, and therefore I came to this spot."

"Git here heap quick. No understand it."

The old redskin's suspicions were aroused. However, he said no more, but gave his attention to his animal. Pulling the picket-pin, he led the animal to a spot where a tiny spring oozed from the ground. Here the horse drank, after which its master led it away, and picketed it in a fresh spot.

This example was followed in the same silent manner by Gonzalez.

The Indian felt around in a place of concealment, and brought forth a rifle with a wonderfully long barrel.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Gun him all right. Now

come, greaser man gent, we go back to play um poker. Mebbe you show Injun the way?"

The crafty old fellow was wondering if Gonzalez could return to the little opening in the chaparral.

Without a word, the Mexican led the way, and his companion noted, with mingled surprise and admiration, that he slipped swiftly and silently through the thicket, taking the most direct course to the opening, which they soon reached.

"Now, greaser man gent, him set down, make himself easy. Joe him build fire. Nobody see firelight here. Heap good place."

The Mexican reclined at ease on the ground, while the Indian gathered dry branches, piled them in a heap, and started a little fire. When this was completed the redskin filled and lighted a black pipe, at which he puffed with every sign of intense satisfaction. For fully five minutes he smoked, occasionally permitting his keen eyes to survey his companion. Finally he grunted again, and drew a pack of cards from beneath his blanket.

"Most ready to play?" he asked.

"All ready," murmured the Mexican.

Joe spread the blanket out, and they sat down, cross-legged, upon it. Then the Indian brought forth all the money he had won in the Gray Dove, and tossed it jingling in a little heap upon the blanket.

"Greaser man gent help count," invited the redskin.

Gonzalez made a gentle gesture.

"I prefer that you should count it," he said.

Without further words, the old Indian began dividing the money by placing a piece of a certain denomination in one pile and another piece of equal value in a different pile. In this manner he soon had the money separated into two heaps.

"You take um that," he said.

"*Gracias*," said the Mexican.

As the redskin fumbled with the cards, he muttered:

"Never meet any greaser man so heap much square. Joe he know many things. He not know this thing."

"Is it possible you think only people of your own race to be honest?" questioned the Mexican.

"Most white men heap crooked. One time Joe he know white man who be honest. Joe no could think so. Take much time to think so. First him hate white man a lot. Him want to kill white man two, three time. Now him heart glad he didn't. Now him proud to know that white man."

"What was his name?" murmured Gonzalez inquiringly.

"Joe he call him Strong Heart. Other white man they call him Frank Merriwell. Oh, him much fine, much honest, much square, like a brick. Old Joe hear him be down in Mexico land somewhere. Old Joe him very old. Him not live much longer. Him die soon, go off to happy hunting-ground. Him got bad rheumatism. Him wind no good now. Him legs very weak. Him say to himself: 'Joe, soon you die, and no see Strong Heart some more.' Then him think what long distance it be down to Mexico land. Him count money. Heap much to pay for car ride. Him say to himself: 'Joe, mebbe Injun have chance to play card, make some more money.' Then him start for Mexico land, and here him be. He buy horse. He ride out where Strong Heart help men build railroad. He come to Quijano. Feel much tired. Drink um some whisky to keep um from git sick. Him sleep some. While him sleep, he hear two bad men talk. It make old Joe feel queer. Um bad man talk of Strong Heart. They hate him much. That make old Joe him blood git warm. He feel much stronger. He say to himself mebbe he can help Strong Heart somehow. Bad men play cards for money. Joe him make believe wake up, and watch um play. Then him git into game. He know one bad man much slick. He see when bad man handle cards heap slippery. Joe not all fool he look. He make um believe him easy mark. Bimeby he know bad man deal him four kings to skin him. He picked cards five-um, six-um, seven-um, eight-um, nine-um, all same kind, and hide um under blanket. When he git four king he say: 'Now slippery card man have four aces.' Then he put four king under blanket, and take out straight flush. Heap good trick. Slippery card man much upset over when him find it out. Mebbe him shoot old Joe, but greaser man gent no let him. Joe never forget—never! Now we play."

CHAPTER VII.

BY THE FIRELIGHT.

The game began. In the Indian's eyes there was an expression that bespoke his deep pleasure in it. He was one who took delight in gambling.

When the first hand was dealt off he paused, and looked at his companion doubtingly. Apparently he was somewhat conscience-stricken, for he said:

"Mebbe greaser man not know game well?"

"Do not worry about that," murmured Gonzalez. "I have played it some."

"Heap crooked game," warned the redskin. "Man him best at fooling, him win everything."

"As the Americans say, I will take my chances."

"When old Joe him win money this way, it belong to him. He no divide some more."

"It is well. If you win, I shall not expect you to divide."

For ten or fifteen minutes they played on with varying fortunes, neither seeming to obtain much advantage. Finally the Indian bet, and Gonzalez stayed in. The Mexican took two cards, while the redskin drew one.

Following this, the betting was quite lively for a few moments, each one raising the other with an air of confidence. At last the Indian tossed a twenty-dollar gold piece into the pot, as a raise.

"Heap good hand," he grunted.

The Mexican looked his cards over with an expression of doubt.

"I thought it possible you might be bluffing," he murmured. "Now I am confident that you have me beaten. I shall lay my cards down, as I have only three five-spots."

The Indian raked in the money.

"Much easy," he half chuckled. "Joe him have four flush. He no git card he wanted."

Saying this, he exposed four diamonds and a club.

The Mexican had put down the winning hand, but had lost the pot to the redskin, who had bluffed him out.

The grin that contorted the wrinkled face of the old man gave him a hideous appearance, and in his eyes there was an unholy light of glee.

"Heap good game!" he observed.

Gonzalez seemed chagrined and disappointed.

A few moments later the Mexican secured a good hand, and came near getting even on it.

"Very good game," he smiled.

The Indian paused to toss more fuel on the fire, after which the playing resumed. Again it happened that both players seemed to get good cards. This took place on the redskin's deal. The betting grew fiercer and fiercer, and continued until every cent of the money that had been divided was heaped in one pile on the blanket.

"We will show the cards down now," said the Mexican.

"Mebbe greaser man want to bet some more?" suggested the Indian.

"I'm quite satisfied as it is. What do you hold?"

"Heap good hand."

The old redskin displayed another straight flush, the four, five, six, seven, and eight-spot of spades.

"Indeed, it is a good hand," smiled Gonzalez; "but I think I have a better one."

The Indian seemed turned to stone when, one after another, his opponent displayed the ten-spot, jack, queen, king, and ace of hearts.

It was a royal flush, the strongest hand that could be held.

For fully two minutes the redskin sat and stared at those cards.

"Heap fine!" he finally said. "Greaser man gent him great player. Where other hand?"

With a little shake, Gonzalez fluttered five cards from his sleeve.

"Here they are, señor," he murmured. "Now, if you please, we'll look at those you have behind your back."

Slowly the Indian reached round behind him, and brought into view five cards, which he dropped, face upward, on the blanket. In those five cards there was one pair of ten-spots.

"It seems that I had you defeated, anyhow," smiled Gonzalez, as he spread out the cards removed from his sleeve, and exposed a pair of jacks.

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian, and made no other comment.

His pipe had been smoked out. Turning toward the fire, he slowly filled and relighted it. A long time he smoked and meditated.

"Heap clever," he finally observed. "Greaser man gent him play nice game. Joe him very much tired. Him take walk to rest."

Then he rose to his feet, and slipped away into the chaparral. While the Indian was gone a change came over the Mexican, who finally lay down, with his back to the fire.

The redskin returned as quietly as he departed, and once more seated himself by the blaze. To his surprise, he saw all the money lying piled, as it had been left, in the middle of the old red blanket.

"Greaser man heap careless," he finally muttered. "Him be robbed sometime."

A strange thought flitted through the Indian's brain, and his eyes glowed greedily. To all appearances, the Mexican was sound asleep, and it would be a simple matter to gather up that money, take the blanket, and depart. It must be confessed that the redskin's fingers actually itched for the little heap of gold and silver that glowed and gleamed dully in the firelight. Once

he made a move as if to touch it, but drew back stiffly, and cried loudly:

"Git up, greaser man! Take your money quick! Bad to leave it like that. Mebbe somebody he want to steal."

The Mexican stirred, and yawned. He sat up, and turned his face toward the firelight. His mustache was gone, and a most remarkable change had come over his features.

As the old Indian saw him now, he gave a great start of unspeakable astonishment. For a few moments he stared in silence, and then once more that grin wreathed his wrinkled face.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled. "Old Joe think it much funny greaser man be so slick. You fool Crowfoot a heap, Strong Heart. Comrade!"

With this cry, he leaped to his feet, and the young man, who had cast aside his disguise, rose also.

A moment later Frank Merriwell was clasped in the arms of the old redskin.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP.

The joy of old Joe Crowfoot could not be expressed in words.

"How you fool Injun so well?" he cried. "Him no know you. Oh, him eyes very bad, very bad. Him gittin' old. Him die soon."

"Come off!" laughed Merry. "You're growing younger every day. That gag about getting old and being used up doesn't go with me."

"Crowfoot he think it much strange greaser man should help him in saloon. No understand that. Now he understand it plenty. You beat Crowfoot. Money all belong to you."

"I wouldn't touch it under any consideration," declared Merry.

"Why not?"

"I don't suppose I can make you understand, but I never take money obtained in such a manner. I don't play cards for money. It is against my principles."

"Um principles no good!" sneered Joe. "What do with money, throw um it away?"

"It belongs to you. You must take it. I don't need the money, Crowfoot. I have enough of my own. You know I've tried to pension you more than once."

"What um pension mean?"

"Why, I've tried to make you take an allowance."

"No git onto allowance."

"I mean that I wanted you to accept money from

me at intervals right along. It is your just due, for you have befriended me many a time."

"No earn money that way," muttered Joe. "Heap 'gainst my principles."

"Well, it's plain we can't agree on principles," smiled Merriwell. "If you would accept my offer, you'd have nothing to worry about, for you could take care of yourself in your old age."

"When old Joe him can't take care of umself, him die quick. Him not much good, nohow. Nobody miss him."

"It's not true, Crowfoot, and you know it. You know I would miss you, and you know my brother, Dick, would miss you. If there are no others in the world, we two are your stanch friends."

It was remarkable to note how the old redskin's face softened, and a genuinely tender light crept into his dark eyes.

"Heap fine! heap fine!" he repeated over and over. "Strong Heart, that would keep old Joe alive. Him not much good, but him think he got two good friends. When him all alone by himself he sit and think of Injun Heart, 'way off in the white boys' school. He think of Strong Heart, most fine, grand man. When him most ready to die, he say: 'Joe, you live longer mebbe, you see Injun Heart, mebbe you see Strong Heart.'"

No wonder Frank Merriwell again seized that dusky hand, and gave it a warm pressure.

"Crowfoot," he said, "I believe you'll live to be a hundred and fifty years old."

"Mebbe so. No can tell. Now we squat. We sit on ground, and hold powwow. You tell um Crowfoot everything. It make him heart glad to listen. You tell him how fine boy Dick git along."

"Oh, he's getting along all right, Joe."

"Him go back to school?"

"Yes."

"Him git there all right. I see him when he come from over big pond. We talk much. Him tell me all about bad boy Arlington, and how bad boy Arlington drive um Dick out of school. Joe he want to go take um bad boy scalp. Dick say no, no. He say they hang old Joe. Old Joe say no matter, for him no good any more."

As they sat there, Merriwell told the old Indian how his brother had returned to Fardale, and been reinstated with honor in the school, while Chester Arlington had been expelled. This seemed to give the redskin some satisfaction, although he muttered repeatedly that Chester had not been punished enough.

"Mebbe Injun Heart him come to Mexico land soon?" questioned Crowfoot.

"I hardly think so," answered Frank, "He won't have an opportunity before another summer, and I may not be here then. By that time I hope to have all the trouble settled, and see the railroad built."

"You have much trouble? Tell um Joe 'bout that."

So Frank explained the situation to the Indian, who nodded and muttered at intervals.

"Gambler man him heap bad," commented Crowfoot. "You have pistol behind him ear. Why you no shoot him then?"

"That would have been murder, Joe. I don't believe in such methods of defeating an enemy."

"Give um gambler man same chance, he shoot you."

"Perhaps that's true, but it wouldn't justify my act if I did such a thing."

"Huh! More principles!" sneered Crowfoot. "Joe he no see it that way. When enemy try to kill him he fix enemy heap quick. Mebbe he have chance bimeby at gambler man. If him do, gambler man bother Strong Heart no more."

"You'd better let me settle my own affair with that man," said Merry. "I'm confident he'll meet defeat in the end."

"You no want Joe to help?"

"If you can assist me, I shall appreciate it, but you must not kill Stockton, unless forced to do so in self-defense."

"Mebbe we make it so self-defense come round all right. You no fuss with old Joe. You leave it to him. Him not much good, still mebbe sometime he be some help to you."

Finally Crowfoot gathered up the money, and stuffed it into his belt until the belt was well filled.

"That last um Crowfoot long time," he said. "No use throw um money away on fool principles, so him take it."

"That's right," laughed Merry. "You deserve every penny of it."

"How cowpuncher boy?" suddenly asked the Indian.

"Buckhart?"

"Um."

"Oh, he's all right."

"Him talk a heap with him face. All same he much good fighter. How Night Eyes?"

"You mean Inza?"

"Um that her name, all right."

"She's my squaw now."

"Hey?" cried old Joe. "Um Strong Heart hitch up with Night Eyes?"

"Yes, we're married."

"Heap much good luck for both," said Joe. "She fine young squaw. Keep Strong Heart him wigwam all neat. Keep him fire burning. Cook him grub. Where she be now?"

"She's up in Tucson, Arizona. I didn't think it best to bring her down here while all this trouble was going on."

"She want to come?"

"Yes; she objected strongly to being left."

"Heap good nerve. She all right. You got papoose?"

"No," confessed Frank.

"Mebbe you have sometime. Mebbe you have one-um, two-um, three-um, four-um, and lots more-um."

At this Merry again laughed heartily, which seemed to cause Crowfoot some wonderment and perplexity.

"You think um Injun make joke," he said. "Crowfoot no see joke. Papoose heap good to have. They make um man's heart strong and warm."

In this manner they talked on for a long time, but finally, having replenished the fire, they lay down to sleep there in the center of the chaparral, which broke the cool night wind, and kept it from them.

When Merry was fast asleep, Crowfoot rose, without as much as a rustle, took his old blanket, and gently spread it over the young man's shoulders. Having done this, he lay down without such shelter, and composed himself to slumber.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAITOR.

Seven mounted men, together with nine unburdened pack-mules, left the town of Quijano, bound for the wild country to the northeast. Six of the men were Mexicans. The seventh was Tom Stockton, the gambler. All were heavily armed.

Evidently it was an expedition of some importance, and the manner and bearing of the little band seemed to indicate that danger was not wholly unanticipated.

Throughout the entire day they pushed on, halting only once for a brief rest while they ate, near a small, sickly stream that oozed from the sands in one spot and disappeared again into the sands not forty rods away.

As night approached they came to the hills, which rose with almost startling abruptness from the broken and uneven table-land. An hour later they made camp,

— with the ragged hills and dark ravines on every side of them.

Two fires gleamed, while the coffee-pots boiled, and the Mexicans sat about, conversing in murmuring tones, smoking their cigarettes.

Tom Stockton lighted a cigarette, and stood where he could scan the faces of his companions. One at a time, he looked them all over, and the expression on his own countenance became one of doubt and uncertainty.

Truly, they were a treacherous, untrustworthy-appearing set of rascals.

"Tony!" called the gambler, in a low tone.

"Yes, señor," answered one of the men, rising immediately and approaching him.

Stockton drew the fellow aside until they were beyond earshot of the others, and stood there in the darkness, just beyond reach of the firelight.

"Tony," said The Wolf, "I have been looking that gang over. Are you certain that every man of them may be trusted? You know them better than I do."

"They know you, Señor Stockton," answered the Mexican, "and they are confident you will keep your promise to reward them liberally and generously for the work. I think you may trust them, but it's well enough to watch them."

"When they realize the amount of money they will have in their clutches to-morrow," said the American, "it is likely to arouse their covetousness. Our nine mules will be heavily loaded."

"Even so, señor. We must then watch them all the closer."

"I am in favor of getting the treasure out of the cave before morning, and starting early."

"I fear it can't be done, señor."

"Why not?"

"You know the story of the cave. It is haunted. That's why the treasure has been safe there, for others must have suspected where it was hidden."

"Do you believe in ghosts, Tony?"

"*Si, si, señor!* I fear greatly the restless spirits of the dead. Long years an old man lived in that cave. He died, and since then his spirit has haunted the place. It is bad enough to go there by day. Our comrades would not venture thither at night. Indeed, when morning comes I think you and I will have to drag the treasure forth from the cave, for I doubt if any of the others will enter it."

Stockton shrugged his shoulders.

"Only fools believe in ghosts," he said; "but, as the safety of the treasure may have depended on such

a fool belief, I am satisfied. We will wait until morning. Tony, I rely on you. While we are moving the money, you and I will watch the rest of this party, and watch them closely."

"And I am to be paid well for this, Señor Stockton?"

"You shall not regret your faithfulness to me, my fine fellow. Depend on that."

They sauntered back to the fires, where the coffee was now prepared and the men were ready to eat. Sitting on the ground, they ate and drank and chatted with the others. When hunger was satisfied, cigarettes were again rolled and lighted.

Suddenly, out of the darkness, came a call that made those seven men start as if touched with electricity. Their hands seized their ready weapons.

"*Hola, comrados!*" cried a voice. "Be not disturbed; it is I, your friend."

There was the click of a horse's hoof striking a stone, and a moment later they beheld the hazy outlines of a man and horse, the former leading the latter, as both drew near.

"Who is it?" they asked one another.

Stockton's face was dark and grim as his fingers gripped the butt of a pistol and he waited.

The stranger came boldly into the firelight, and he, too, was a Mexican. With no little surprise, Stockton recognized him.

"Hang me if it isn't Pedro!" he muttered. "What in blazes is he doing here?"

"Greetings, Señor Stockton," called the newcomer. "I have overtaken you at last. Long have I followed your trail."

"How do you happen to be here, Pedro?" coldly demanded the Mexican.

"I have wished much to join you again, Señor Chief," was the answer.

It is possible Pedro noted with some uneasiness that several of the men were regarding him in anything but a friendly manner. He hastened to greet these men, speaking to each and all by name, and expressing his pleasure at again beholding them.

They muttered among themselves, and failed to respond to his greetings.

"I am hungry, comrades," said Pedro.

"Eat," invited Stockton. "One of the boys will take charge of your horse."

A man silently rose from the ground, took the bridle from Pedro's hand, and led the horse away. Pedro seated himself, and was soon eating and drinking in a manner that indicated his hunger. Still, he was not

wholly at his ease, and his restless eyes roved from face to face. He saw those men smoking in silence and gazing grimly at the blazing fagots. Stockton drew near, and flung himself on his side and elbow, with a blanket spread beneath him.

"How did you find me, Pedro?" he asked.

"I reached Quijano after you had departed. When they told me how many men were with you, and that you had taken pack-mules, I knew it must be you were coming thither, and, as soon as possible, I rode to join you here."

"Then you did not follow our trail all the way from Quijano?"

"It was not necessary. I knew where to find you if I arrived in time, for the haunted cave is near."

Stockton frowned. This fellow was one who knew the location of the cave, and suspected that the treasure stolen from the pay train was hidden there.

"I have not forgotten your promises to me, Señor Chief," reminded Pedro, "and I'm sure you have not forgotten how much I did for you. That act came near costing me dearly."

"How so?"

"When you had escaped I told Conchita it was I who set you free. I told her why I did so. I accused her of her treachery, and mocked her for her folly in caring for the American, who was already married, and who was deceiving her."

"What did she say to that?"

"You should have seen her, señor! Oh, she was furious indeed! She was most beautiful in her wrath. Again and again she called me a fool. She informed me that already she knew the American to be married, for he had told her so."

"Is that right?" asked Stockton indifferently.

"*Si, señor*, it is the truth. Still, my rage against the American did not abate, and I swore to kill him. I sought the opportunity, but, when I tried to sink my steel in his body, he caught me by the wrist, and disarmed me. We struggled, but his strength was wonderful. I was like a child in his hands. Then came Conchita, who told him I had aided you to escape, and I was thrown a prisoner into the room from which you fled. I thought they would take my life, for the anger of the American was terrible to behold. In that room I waited until they should come to destroy me. They did not come, for Conchita came first. She stole there secretly, and unlocked the door. She put her arms about me, and swore she loved me. Then she told me where already she had hidden a saddled horse

which would take me away to safety. Thus I escaped, señor, and now I am here with you."

"You're bold, Pedro."

"Why, señor?"

Stockton glanced at the rest of the band.

"You have ventured among the comrades you betrayed."

"But I have your promise, chief. You swore to shield me from their wrath."

"Such a promise is easy to give when one makes it to save his own neck," muttered the gambler.

Pedro now seemed most uneasy and apprehensive, and he continued to watch the men about him. Nevertheless, he did not hear the returning footsteps of the one who had taken the horse away. This man came up behind Pedro, and suddenly sprang upon his shoulders, flinging him upon his back. In a twinkling the others were up and at the fellow who had betrayed them. He struggled desperately, but they soon subdued him, and bound him securely, in spite of his protests and his appeals to Stockton.

Through it all the gambler remained in the same reclining attitude, resting on his elbow, as he deliberately rolled and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Your promise, Señor Chief—your promise!" reminded Pedro, his voice shaking with fear.

"Let's see what the boys think about it," said Stockton coolly.

Then Tony stood up in the firelight.

"There is but one fate for a traitor!" he cried. "This man betrayed us to our enemies. Through his action many of our comrades were slain. Their blood calls to us for vengeance!"

"It was a mistake!" panted Pedro. "I have repented, and I am sorry."

"That is not enough," said Tony harshly. "Repentance cannot atone for those who were slain."

The others muttered hoarsely and ominously.

Pedro's face was ghastly pale in the flickering firelight. Again he appealed to Stockton.

"Will you go back on your word of honor, Señor Chief?" he quavered. "No, no, you can't do that!"

"A pledge to a traitor is worthless," said Stockton relentlessly. "You betrayed us once. How can we trust you again? You might do it another time. Who knows? Even now you may be here for that purpose."

"No, no!" protested the wretched prisoner. "I swear by the saints!"

"Who can believe you? Perchance you have lied about what happened after my escape. Perchance you

made a compact with Merriwell if he would not punish you, agreeing to aid him against us. No, Pedro, I shall not interfere. Your fate lies in the hands of your comrades."

Then the Mexicans drew together, and muttered among themselves, while Pedro watched with sinking heart, hoping against hope. He saw them gather a little bunch of twigs, which were broken into various lengths. One man held these twigs in his hands, with the ends protruding, and the others drew from them, each taking a twig. When all had drawn, the various twigs were measured, and immediately two stepped apart from the others. One of these touched Pedro on the shoulder.

"Come," he said.

When the wretch refused to stir and lifted his voice in wild entreaties, they seized him, and dragged him to his feet. The two men who had thus been chosen by lot for the black task grasped him, one on either side, and dragged him away into the darkness, while the others looked on silently, and Stockton calmly smoked his cigarette.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE HAUNTED CAVE.

On the brink of a black chasm, the depths of which lay hidden in the darkness, the three men halted.

"This is the place," said one of them.

"No, no!" whimpered the terrified captive. "Spare me, comrades—spare me!"

"It cannot be," was the grim retort. "See, Pedro, it is dark down there. How far it is to the bottom we do not know. It will be easy for you to spring from the brink. When the bottom is reached, all will be ended."

But the captive struggled and held back.

"Then one of us must do the work!" muttered one of his companions. "Take your knife, Martinez. It is you!"

"I give you the honor, Miguel," said Martinez. "I shall not do it. I have slept with Pedro's blanket covering me."

"Then I must strike!" grated Miguel, as he produced the weapon.

The captive fell on his knees at the very brink of the black gorge, whimpering piteously for his life.

This was too much for Martinez, who whirled suddenly and fled into the darkness. Not so Miguel. He stood close to the victim and lifted the blade.

At this moment something whistled through the air,

and struck Miguel, who flung up his hands with a choking, smothered cry, reeled backward, and went whirling into the black void of the gorge.

Thus sayed at the moment he believed he was whispering his last prayer to the holy saints, Pedro remained on his knees like one turned to stone.

His staring eyes beheld a shape coming through the gloom, followed closely by another. In a moment two men had reached him, one of whom paused and peered into the black depths of the gorge, while he muttered in disappointment:

"Much fool to fall! Heap good knife gone with him."

The speaker was an Indian, but his companion was a white man; and the white man touched Pedro on the shoulder, as he spoke in a low tone.

"That was a close call for you, my boy. You'll have to thank old Joe Crowfoot for your life. When you get a chance, you better pay him for the good knife he lost."

Pedro recognized the voice with a sensation of astonishment that was mingled with both doubt and joy.

"It is Señor Merriwell!" he huskily exclaimed.

"Yes, Pedro," was the answer, in Frank Merriwell's voice, "it is I. You're a rascal, Pedro, but we didn't fancy seeing you murdered in such a manner. I was inclined to shoot, but Crowfoot knew a better way, and the knife he hurled at your would-be executioner flew as straight as a bullet."

Pedro groveled at the young American's feet, and tried to kiss his hands.

"You have saved me, señor!" he panted. "I swear by all the saints I'll not forget it! Those men I have called comrades doomed me to death, and I'll not forget that, either!"

"Stand up," said Merry, as he aided the weak and shaking wretch to rise. "Let me see if I can't free your hands."

When Pedro was liberated he would have embraced Frank Merriwell, but the American sternly held him off.

"It's taking chances to trust you, my boy," said Frank; "but I'm going to give you one more show. It ever a man needed friends, you do, for you know what your fate will be if you again fall into the hands of your late companions."

"I have sworn by the saints," said Pedro. "Again I will swear on the crucifix as I kiss it. You shall see that Pedro can keep an oath."

"Heap better git a move on," muttered old Joe.

"Mebbe somebody come back to find how job am done."

"That's right," agreed Merriwell. "Come on, Pedro, and we'll get away from here."

The terrible experiences through which the Mexican had passed made him stumble and reel like a drunken man as he followed his rescuers. The old Indian moved with the silence of the wind, and the feet of Merriwell made scarcely more noise.

Finally they halted in the seclusion of a dark valley, and there Merriwell told Pedro how he and Crowfoot had followed the trail of Stockton and his companions to that wild spot in the hills. As a trailer, the equal of old Joe did not live.

"We know Stockton has come here for the purpose of moving the treasure he stole from the pay train," said Merriwell. "It is our hope to take that treasure from him."

"But you are only two, señor," reminded the Mexican. "There are seven of them."

"Only six," said Frank. "One of them has met his just deserts. You forget that there are three of us, for we count on you now, Pedro."

"Still it is three against six, and the six are led by that terrible man who is called The Wolf."

"Even The Wolf is not invincible. The treasure——"

"Hush, señor!" breathed Pedro. "I know where it is."

"You know," exclaimed Merry eagerly; "you know where that treasure is concealed?"

"Si, señor."

"Then you must lead us to it. By Jove, if we can reach it first, we may fool Stockton!"

"But how can you move it? It is heavy."

"That's a problem for us, Joe," said Frank. "Can we solve it?"

For a few moments the old Indian seemed to meditate. Finally he gave a grunt and observed:

"Bad men have heap good horses and mules. We take um."

"That's a clever idea," nodded Merriwell. "But first let's find the treasure. I want to know where it is. I want to put my hands on it."

"Not to-night! not to-night!" palpitated Pedro. "It is in the Haunted Cave. That cave is guarded by a spirit."

"Show me the cave," came grimly from Merry's lips, "and a hundred spirits will not keep me from the treasure!"

Pedro told him the story of the cave, and why it was shunned by those who knew of its existence.

"All the better opportunity for us to work to-night," said Frank. "It's hardly probable that Stockton can induce those men to approach the spot. Take us there, Pedro, at once. Remember your oath. Remember we saved your life. If you have an atom of courage, you should face this spook now."

Pedro straightened up and flung back his shoulders. "Carambá! It shall be done!" he cried, in a low tone. "Come with me."

His knowledge of the locality proved accurate, for in something more than half-an-hour the three were standing before the mouth of the cavern, which was hidden by a rank growth of bushes.

Parting these, Pedro showed them the low, dark opening to the cave, although his blood was chilled by fear as he did so.

"The treasure must be in there," he said. "I am sure it is."

"Then we'll go in," declared Merry.

"No, no," protested Pedro, "not I! Never!"

"Yes, you will," said Frank, who even then did not care to leave the man alone.

Crowfoot told them to remain where they were, and slipped away into the gloom of the night. He was gone nearly twenty minutes, but when he returned he had two resinous sticks of wood, which might serve them as torches.

The torches were lighted, and they prepared to enter the haunted cave.

"I will go ahead," said Merriwell. "You follow me, Pedro. Old Joe will bring up the rear."

"I can't! I can't!" palpitated the Mexican.

Frank turned and held his torch so the light fell fully on his own face, and that of Pedro. He looked straight into the Mexican's eyes as he said:

"You will. Come."

Crouching low, he slowly entered the mouth of the cave, and, despite the fact that he was shaking in every limb, the Mexican followed. After them both came Crowfoot, with a torch in one hand and his long rifle in the other.

Having proceeded a short distance, Frank found that the passage grew higher, and he was able to stand erect. It was a dry cave, although the air within it was chilled and caused Pedro's teeth to chatter. The passage wound to the right and then to the left, finally leading them into a small chamber; and there, on the ground at one side, was a pile of small leather sacks, stuffed to bursting.

Without a word, Merriwell sprang forward and touched them with his hand. He laughed at the feel of them. Turning, he thrust the torch into Pedro's shaking fingers, after which he lifted one of the sacks. It was very heavy, and Merriwell knew beyond question that they had found the stolen treasure.

"If you had this money, Crowfoot," he smiled, "you could play poker with it to your heart's content."

"Heap much," said old Joe. "Um sure it money, Frank?"

"We'll make sure in a moment," said Merry, as he

examined the fastening of a sack. "Now, I don't think we need to, for they are all locked. It is best not to open them. Put your hand here, Crowfoot. You can feel the coin."

The old Indian's eyes gleamed as he felt of the leather sacks.

"Much money, much money," he said. "Injun not know there was so much anywhere."

"Fortune is with us thus far," murmured Merriwell. "Now if it stays by us, and we can get out those horses and mules, we'll do our best to pack this money to the nearest railroad point. It's a job—a dangerous job. We'll have a lot of wolves howling on our trail."

Of a sudden Crowfoot gave a hiss and cocked his ear to listen. Neither Frank nor Pedro had heard a suspicious sound, but after a few moments both fancied they could detect the faint murmur of voices.

"Somebody come!" whispered Crowfoot. "Put out torches!"

"The ghost!" breathed Pedro, his teeth chattering more than ever.

"Keep still, man," commanded Merry. "It's ten chances to one that Stockton has come to investigate. If he finds you and gets his hands on you, you know what your fate will be. Your safety depends on your silence. Out with the torches, Crowfoot!"

A moment later the cave was plunged in darkness, and they crouched there, whiffing the smoke of the extinguished torches.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE SILENT NIGHT.

The sound of voices became more and more distinct. Listening intently, Merriwell decided that there were two men who had entered the cave, and one of these he knew was Stockton. The other must be a Mexican.

"We have to shoot um," whispered Crowfoot.

"Perhaps not," breathed Merriwell. "I'm going to try to frighten them. No matter what you hear, Pedro, hold your tongue and don't betray us."

Ahead of them there was a gleam of light.

Frank believed the moment to try his plan had come. A strange, hollow, awesome groan sounded through the oblong chamber and seemed to echo in the passage.

Immediately one of the two men approaching uttered an exclamation in Spanish, and the sound of his voice told that he was stricken with terror.

The other must have been surprised, but he swore softly in English.

The awesome groan was repeated.

Following this a ghostly voice was heard to utter these words in Spanish:

"Who comes here to disturb my rest? Beware, lest the wrath of the dead fall upon you!"

Out in the passage there was a second cry, and the sound of hastily retreating footsteps. Plainly Stockton's Mexican comrade had fled, and soon the fading torchlight told that the gambler was following him.

"Holy saints! what was it?" whispered Pedro. "The voice was in the air! It was the spirit who spoke!"

"Rats!" chuckled Frank Merriwell. "I'm not a spirit yet. I did the talking, and I think it curled their hair a little. I don't believe Stockton will be able to keep his friend anywhere in this vicinity. Let's creep out, without lighting our torches, and see if they are gone."

In truth, that awesome voice had filled Stockton's companion with the greatest terror. The gambler had succeeded in inducing Tony to accompany him to the cave, but when Tony fled, he turned and followed. Outside the cavern he overtook the Mexican, who seized him with quivering hands, as he gasped:

"For the love of Heaven, Señor Chief, let's get away from here! I told you that the place was guarded by the dead."

Now, for all of his boasted nerve, Tom Stockton was not wholly without superstition, and he had felt his own blood turn icy cold in his veins.

"All right, Tony," he said. "I don't believe there's anything to run from, but you've lost your courage, and we'll go."

"You heard it, chief, did you not?" questioned Tony.

"Heard what?"

"Heard the voice."

"Oh, I heard something, but I believe it was the wind."

"The wind, señor—the wind in the cave? How could that be?"

"Didn't you ever hear of moaning caves, Tony?"

"Never, señor."

"There are such places. They are freaks of nature. Usually they have two openings, one by which the wind enters, and the other by which it is drawn forth, making a groaning sound."

"Talk not to me of such things, Señor Chief. It was not the sound we heard."

On rejoining their comrades, they found the men greatly perplexed, for Miguel had not returned. This gave Stockton a feeling of uneasiness, and he bade them search for him. Nevertheless, searching was vain, and they found no trace of the missing man who had been left to dispose of the traitor.

Ere sleeping, Stockton himself walked down into the little hollow where the horses and pack-animals were picketed. All were grazing quietly, and the gambler returned to the camp.

With the first suggestion of day, Stockton rose and woke the others.

"Start up the fire, boys," he said. "Look after the animals, and we'll make ready for business. We must get a start as soon as possible."

While two of them built a fire, others lazily proceeded down into the valley to attend to the horses and mules. In a few moments these men came rushing back, uttering cries of consternation.

"What the devil is the matter?" demanded Stockton, as he met them. "What's this racket all about?"

"The horses, chief—the horses!"

"Well, what about them?"

"They are gone!"

"Gone?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Impossible!"

"They are gone and likewise the mules. There's not a creature left."

Stockton dashed down into the valley to satisfy himself. He found the men had spoken the truth. Not a beast was left.

More than that, further investigation showed that half their outfits had been removed from beneath their very noses in camp. While they slept, these things had been taken away. It was the work of some one clever indeed.

The rage of Stockton was unspeakable. He raved at them for a pack of sleepy fools, while they listened in sullen, discomfited silence.

"It was the work of those dogs, Miguel and Pedro!" cried the gambler. "They were friends once. Miguel betrayed us and set Pedro free. Together they have stolen our animals, and the missing portion of the outfit."

"It must be the truth, Señor Chief," agreed Tony. "There is no other explanation of it."

"A curse upon those treacherous whelps!" agreed Stockton. "When I find them, I'll snuff them both like that!" he snapped his fingers twice.

But now another fear assailed him.

"They knew of the haunted cave—at least, Pedro did. Perhaps those fools have tried to carry off some of the treasure. Come, boys, we must investigate."

They followed him as he rushed away toward the cave.

On reaching the mouth of the cavern, he paused only to light a torch. Although he appealed to Tony, the Mexican held back, and he was compelled to enter the cavern alone.

A few minutes later he came forth, his face wearing a terrible expression of fury.

"What is it, chief?" asked Tony, awestruck by the look on the man's countenance.

"I've been robbed!" answered Stockton harshly. "There's not a dollar of the treasure left in this cave!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE HEAD OF CONSTRUCTION.

Two hundred men, Irishmen, negroes and Italians, were at work at the head of construction on the Central Sonora Railroad.

One mile back along the line was the big dining tent and the sleeping tents.

Barney Mulloy, in overalls and flannel shirt, the latter open at the throat, stood, with his hands on his hips and a frown on his honest face, watching the men who were taking orders from the construction boss.

Another man, with the map of the Emerald Isle on his face, approached Barney.

"I say, Mulloy," he called, "where the divvil do you s'pose the construction train is?"

Barney shook his head.

"Hanged av I know, Casey," he confessed, in his rich brogue. "Oi were thinking av thot meself."

"We're after putting down the last rails, Barney, and the ties are all down. Av thot train don't come in soon, there'll be no more work th' day."

"There do be something wrong, Casey," said Mulloy. "The train, wid a load of ties and rails, should av been here foive hour ago."

"Roight ye are, me bhoy. Phwat do ye think th' matther can be?"

"More throuble wid the strikers, Oi fancy."

"Perhaps The Wolf is behind it."

"Mebbe so," nodded Mulloy. "Frank Merriwell had thot gint nicely thrapped, but The Wolf were slippery an' he escaped. At least, thot's phwat Gallup reported. Frank shtarted out on the trail of th' baste, an' Oi thought he moight make it so warm for Mishter Stockton thot niver a bit of toime would Stockton have to bother us."

"Gallup hasn't returned?"

"No, Ephy wint away in search av Frank, and niver an oye have Oi put on him since. It's oneasy Oi am, Casey. Oi feel Oi'm not doing me juty. Oi'd loike to be wid Frankie a-huntin' The Wolf."

"Yer business is here, Mulloy, me son," said Casey. "You'd better lave thot other job to some one else. There'll be other throubles beside thim made by The Wolf av the company don't pay off the min soon. The strikers have made this crew oneasy, for they've been afther telling the boys thot niver a cent av money will they git for their work."

"Thot's all rot, Casey. Mr. Scott has sint for the coin, and ivery mon of the sthrikers will be paid the minute it gits here."

"It takes time to bring it, Mulloy. Mr. Scott were lucky when he got out av Mesquite with a whole skin. Do you know where he is now?"

"Hush, Casey! He's in Espita. He's afther laying low there and giving orders. The grasers haven't located him agin."

"Shure if they do, he'll never be able to hold them off. There's O'Brien signaling to me. The last rail is down. We'll have to knock off."

"All roight," nodded Barney. "We'll knock off and go back to the tints to wait for the train."

Ten minutes later the crew shouldered their tools and lined out jaggedly as they trudged down the tracks toward the tents. There was some muttering among them as they spoke of the troubles the railroad was having, and discussed the assertion of the strikers that no money was forthcoming to pay for labor.

Mulloy was in their midst, and he heard some of this talk.

"Be afther lettin' up on thot, ye spalpanes!" he cried sharply. "Ivery mon of ye will be paid what he earns, Oi give ye me word of honor for it."

"What-a you know-a about that?" demanded an

Italian. "How you can-a say so, when you not-a see da mon?"

"I know the min behind the job," retorted Mulloy. "Av they wisht, they could buy the whole av Mexico."

"Dat all-a right, all-a right," jabbered the Italian. "We like-a to see da mon."

"No back talk, ye tarrier!" exclaimed the young Irishman, quickly, stepping nearer to the grumbler. "Oi don't like it, and Oi won't have it."

The expression on his face silenced the man.

Arriving at the tents, the laborers scattered themselves about, lighting their pipes and producing cards.

Mulloy and Casey held a consultation.

While they were talking, Barney suddenly lifted his hand to his eyebrows, shading his eyes from the sunlight, as he gazed away across the broken plain.

"There do be some one coming," he observed. "It's a gint on horseback."

"Oi can't see him," said Casey, squinting hard in an effort to see the approaching man.

"Yer eyes aren't as good as mine," chuckled Mulloy.

"Where are me field-glasses? Oi'd like to take a look at him."

Mulloy hurried into one of the tents, and came forth with a fine pair of field-glasses, which he adjusted and leveled on the horseman, who was now a small, dark speck in the distance, occasionally appearing plainly, and then disappearing from view as he descended into a hollow.

After a time Barney muttered:

"It's not a Mexican. Oi know the way the grasers ride. This chap is awkward in the saddle."

Five minutes later he cried:

"Oi do belave on me soul thot it's Gallup."

Gallup, it proved to be. Ephraim rode up on a weary horse, both man and beast being covered with dust.

"Haow are ye, Barney?" he called. "Haow's things going?"

"Bad, Ephy, bad, me bhoy," answered Mulloy. "Is it news yez bring us? Oi hope it's good news."

Gallup awkwardly swung out of the saddle, seeming stiff and sore.

"Dinged if it's much news," he added, with a doleful intonation.

"Yez didn't find no trace av Frankie?"

"Waal, I followed him into a measly little place called Quijano. That is, I kinder reckoned he went there, but, arter I reached Quijano, I couldn't find a blessed soul who had seen nothin' of him. All the same, Stockton had been in that town, where he picked up a lot of horses and pack-mules and started out with six men. Where he was baound for nobody knowed. What's the matter here, anyhaow? Why ain't the men to work?"

Mulloy explained. And Gallup looked far from pleased when he found that labor had ceased because the construction-train had not arrived with ties and rails.

"Ye might be keepin' the men gradin'," he said.

"Av ye'll take a look at the line of dirrut that we've

struck out at the head av the rails, ye'll see why we knocked off."

"Waal, mebbe it won't do no hurt to let 'em rest some," said Gallup. "I'm hungry enough to eat a baked bootheel."

Together he and Mulloy entered the dining tent, where Gallup's hunger was finally appeased.

The sun was fast sinking toward the western horizon when Casey came rushing into the tent and announced that other horsemen were approaching.

"I can't make aout how many there are," he said, "but it looks like there might be fifteen or twenty av them."

Mulloy and Gallup quickly followed him from the tent. He pointed toward the northeast, where they plainly saw moving figures and a light cloud of dust.

"They're afther hurrying some!" muttered Mulloy, as he trained the field-glasses in that direction.

"How many av them are there?" inquired Casey.

Mulloy did not reply at once, but, after a few moments, he announced:

"Oi can't make aout more than three riders, but, on me soul, there are a dozen bastes. It looks like a pack-train. Av Oi'm not mistaken, they av a lot of loaded mules strung out in a line, and they're hurrying as hard as they can, at thot."

"Mebbe they're enemies," suggested Gallup. "They may make trouble for us, Barney. Where are your shooting-irons? Ain't ye got none?"

"Shure we have. The whole outfit is packed in the cook's tint, where he kapes watch av them. We didn't think it good judgmint to let the min have weapons."

"Can't ye trust none of them?"

"Oi s'pose there might be twinty or thirty good, honest Irishmen in the bunch."

"Then, by gum, you'd better arm them Irishmen and make ready for a fuss."

This struck both Mulloy and Casey as a wise suggestion, and they lost no time in hurrying among the laborers, picking out such men as they believed trustworthy. These were mostly Irishmen, but among them were two or three Italians and one negro.

Having singled out these men, they led them to the cook's tent and armed them with rifles and revolvers.

This done, Mulloy again made haste to bring his field-glasses to bear on the approaching strangers.

Almost immediately he gave a sharp cry.

"Oi understand why they're in such a divvil of a hurry," he declared. "They're pursued! Oi see six min coming afther them!"

By this time the men of the railroad were able to observe with the naked eye what was taking place. They saw the burdened pack-mules driven onward by three men, whose behavior indicated that they were doing their best to escape from the pursuing horsemen.

Mulloy's blood began to grow warm in his veins.

"Begorra it's a fight we'll have av Oi'm not mistaken!" he cried. "Look, Gallup, did yez see thot? One of thim horsemin fired on the gints wid the pack-mules."

Ephraim had plainly seen the puff of smoke which indicated that one of the pursuers had fired a shot.

These pursuers rapidly drew nearer to the fugitives, in spite of the efforts of the latter to drive the burdened pack-animals fast enough to prevent such a thing.

Finally there were several puffs of smoke, and to the ears of the watching railroad builders came the faint, far-away cracking of rifles.

"The spalpanes who are doing the shooting are grasers as shure as ye live, bhoys!" shouted Mulloy. "They're bandits, and Oi'll stake me loife on it! Come on, Casey! Come on, Gallup! It's up to us. We must trot aout there and take a hand in the scrimmage."

"This is the gol-dingdest country for fighting I ever see," grumbled Ephraim. "If it keeps up, I bet a Hubbard squash I'll get a lead pill between my ribs. Dingid if I don't eenmost wish I was ter hum on the farm!"

In spite of his words, Gallup was with the foremost of the armed men who trotted from the tents to take part in the encounter.

One of the fugitives was a picturesque figure, riding a black horse and sitting like a Centaur in the saddle. Behind him flapped a red blanket, which seemed attached to his shoulders.

"It's a graser, an American and an Injun!" muttered Mulloy.

Even as Barney spoke, the man of the red blanket reined his horse about, lifted his rifle, and fired.

"Hooroo!" shouted Mulloy, jumping into the air as he ran. "That gint can shoot some! Did yez see how neat he picked one av the grasers out av the saddle?"

Having fired the shot that tumbled one of the pursuers to the dust, the owner of the red blanket whirled in behind his companions, seeming to hold himself ready to repeat his act if the enemy pressed too close.

That shot caused the pursuers to falter, but evidently they were urged on by their leader, who had seen the armed laborers rushing forth from the tents.

Five pursuers remained, and they were incited to a reckless charge by their leader.

This time the man of the red blanket was not alone when he turned to fire. Another of the three fugitives turned also, and their weapons spouted smoke.

Two horses went down.

The third fugitive rode along among the mules, belaboring them with a whip and yelling at them to force them into greater speed.

"Holy Saint Pathrick! Oi think thot will sthop the grasers for awhoile!" cried Mulloy.

Stop them it did. In spite of all their leader could do, they refused a charge in the face of such unerring shooting. In disgust, the leader stopped his horse and emptied a pistol after the fugitives. Then he turned back, and rode away behind the retreating Mexicans, who had picked up their two unhorsed comrades.

A few minutes later the armed laborers reached the fugitives. Both Mulloy and Gallup rushed straight toward one of them, whom they recognized, for all of the dust and grime which covered him from head to heels.

"Frankie, be bhoy, it's tickled ter death Oi am to see yez!" cried Barney.

"Yes, gol-ding your pate! where have yeou been?" spluttered Gallup.

Frank Merriwell leaped out of the saddle and shook hands with them, laughing with relief and satisfaction.

"As you see," he said, "we've been having a warm time with The Wolf."

"And phwat have yez on your mules?" questioned Barney.

"Hush!" murmured Frank, bending toward the young Irishman. "Those mules are loaded with money."

"The divvil ye say!"

"It's the treasure stolen from the pay train," explained Merriwell. "With the aid of Crowfoot and that Mexican, I found out where it was hidden in a cave, secured the mules and part of the horses belonging to Stockton's crowd, and here we are. Had we been able to get hold of all of the horses, we'd have had no trouble. Two of them got away, and Stockton must have recovered the animals. They enabled him to ride to some ranch and secure others for his gang. Then they took up our trail, and you saw the finish."

Mulloy was filled with astonishment and admiration over Frank's success in recovering the stolen treasure.

"Phwat are you going to do wid it, Merry?" he inquired, in a guarded tone.

"I'm going to pay off the laborers, and break the strike on this road," was the answer.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRANK DELIVERS THE MONEY.

The sacks of coin were placed in the cook's tent that night, and guarded by the armed men chosen by Mulloy and Casey.

All through the night Merriwell sat with a rifle across his knees and the treasure before him, never once closing his eyes in sleep.

Wrapped in his old blanket, Crowfoot slept near by, having complained that he was "much old" and "heap tired." At intervals, however, the aged Indian softly opened one eye and rolled it around inquiringly, following which, he seemed to slumber again. Merriwell knew that at the slightest indication of trouble old Joe would be wide-awake and ready to do his part in defense of the treasure.

Evidently Stockton knew better than to attempt an attack, so the night passed without incident.

Mulloy came peering into the tent with the first suggestion of daylight.

"It's a nighthawk ye are, Frankie," he declared. "Oi

wanted to spell yez, but ye wouldn't hear to it. Ye must be completely done up."

"Oh, I think I'm good for another night of it, if necessary," was the answer. "Still I'm willing to catch a few winks now, if you'll take my place until breakfast."

Frank dropped off to sleep the moment he rolled himself in a blanket, and he did not open his eyes until Barney shook him and announced that breakfast was ready.

Old Joe sat guard by the treasure while Merry and the others ate in the dining tent with the laborers.

Mulloy had explained the situation to Frank, telling how the men waited in vain on the previous day for a construction-train.

"We'll take possession of the first train that comes in," said Frank, "and move the money out of these parts."

"Phwat if no train comes?" questioned Barney.

"Then we'll have to move the stuff on these pack-mules; and I want every trusty man you have as a treasure guard. I shall want them just the same in case a train does come. You are to select the men, Barney, but you are to inform them that I'm their leader and they must take orders from me."

"Oi'll do thot same, Frankie. Lave it to me."

"When you have them picked out, I wish you would call them apart by themselves and let me talk to them."

Thirty minutes later Merriwell was surveying a band of rough-looking fellows chosen by Mulloy.

"Men," said Frank, "I want you for a special duty. There may be danger connected with it. Mulloy tells me he thinks you trustworthy to the last man. You are all armed. To begin with, I'm going to tell you what I want of you, so you'll understand your duty. Those sacks in the cook's tent contain the money stolen from the pay train some time ago. I have been fortunate enough to regain possession of it. That money is due the laborers who are now on strike. I propose to see that every man is paid off at the earliest possible moment. To do this, I must take this money back to Mesquite or some other town where the payment can be made. It must be properly guarded, and you are the men chosen to act as guard over it. If a train comes in, we'll put it aboard and take it to Mesquite or Espita to-day. Every man who accompanies me as one of the guard shall be paid fifty dollars for his service. I give you my pledge to see that you receive this promised sum. If there are any among you who do not care to take part in this business, let them withdraw now."

Not a man moved.

"Begorra, ye may depind on the whole av us!" cried an Irishman.

"Dat's right, boss," grinned the negro. "If dere's any fightin', yo' bet we'll make it good and warm. Yah! yah! yah!"

"Dat all-a-right-a," chattered an Italian. "Fifty dol' good-a da mon'. We like-a it."

Frank smiled with satisfaction.

"It's settled, then," he said. "We'll wait until noon

for a train. If none comes, we'll start out with the mules this afternoon."

The sun had climbed well into the eastern sky when, far away, they detected a hazy line of smoke. A little later the whistle of a locomotive was heard, and soon the train came into view.

When this train arrived, however, there was no little surprise to note that it was made up of a locomotive and two box cars.

It was not a construction-train, and the men listened eagerly for an explanation from the engineer.

The engineer and fireman seemed the only men with the train. The former was a thin, shifty-eyed fellow by the name of Bronson.

"Where are our rails and ties, Bronson?" demanded Mulloy, the moment the engine came to a full stop.

The engineer stood on the step of the cab as he answered.

"I don't believe you'll get any more ties and rails for awhile," he said, with a grin. "The strikers have seized them and placed armed guards over them. We can't move anything."

"Then phwat are ye doing here wid this sort av a train?" warmly questioned Barney.

"Well, some of us kinder reckoned you people would be ready to quit work. We're here to take you away."

"Is thot so?" cried the young Irishman. "Well, begorra, we're going to stay here and finish this job!"

"Oh, do as you like about that," said Bronson, with an insolent air. "I'm going back in thirty minutes. I stay here just long enough to shift the engine to the other end of these cars."

Having made this statement, Bronson stepped back into the cab, while the fireman climbed over the coal to the rear end of the tender, where he crouched over the coupling that connected the cars with the engine.

The engineer called to one of the laborers, who sprang into the gap.

"Harris," he said, "I want you to throw that switch for me. I'm going to run the engine onto the spur and let the cars go past on the main line. You know how to handle a switch."

"I should say I did," nodded Harris.

"All right, come ahead and attend to it."

Harris leaped off and trotted down to the switch.

In the meantime, Merriwell was holding a consultation with Mulloy.

The engineer gave a clang at the bell and began backing up. He backed some distance and stopped. A moment later he came on again, and, as soon as the train received sufficient impetus, he applied the locomotive brake, which permitted the fireman to pull the coupling-pin. Then the engine shot ahead onto the short spur track, which had been opened by Harris. Immediately Harris closed the switch, and the two cars ran past on the main line, the fireman having climbed the iron ladder of one of them that he might put on the brake.

The locomotive backed off the switch and ran down to couple onto the cars.

By this time Merriwell was ready, and he swung onto the locomotive to speak to Bronson.

"We have some stuff to be moved," he said. "A part of the men will accompany us. Stop opposite the tents."

"All right, sir," said Bronson, "just as you say."

When the train came to a stand near the tents, the men chosen as the treasure guard appeared, two at a time, carrying the leather sacks of money. These sacks were loaded into one of the two cars.

When this work was completed, Ephraim Gallup remained on the car. He was armed with a rifle and a brace of heavy revolvers.

"Close the door, Frankie," he said. "I'll fasten her on the inside, and Heaven have mercy on anybody who tries to git in until I hear you say open it!"

The door was closed and fastened. Then the men chosen to guard the treasure climbed into the other car, which was next to the locomotive.

Frank swung up the steps into the engine.

"Bronson," he said, "we have a valuable load. Do you know where Watson Scott can be found?"

"Yes, sir; I understand he is in Espita."

"Then through to Espita we go. Don't stop for anything or anybody until we reach there. If we land safely in Espita, you shall have a hundred dollars and your fireman fifty."

"All right," said Bronson; "I'll land you there, you bet!"

Merriwell sprang off and entered the car with the other armed men. Leaning from the open side door, he waved his hand.

"All right, engineer," he called.

Bronson gave a pull at the whistle cord, and the whistle of the locomotive shrieked. The fireman clanged the bell, and the train began to move.

"Begorra, here we go!" chuckled Mulloy. "This is Frank Merriwell's pay train. Oi'm bettin' me loife that yez settle the throuble on this road to-day, Merry, me bhoy."

The road-bed was rough and unsettled, and the cars rocked and reeled over the rails when Bronson opened the throttle wide and obtained good headway.

Twenty miles were covered in a trifle more than thirty minutes, which was astonishing time, considering the roughness of the road.

Suddenly it seemed to Frank that the train gave a slight jump and shot onward with increased speed.

"Something's wrong!" he muttered.

A moment later he was at the open side door of the box car. Leaning out, he looked back, and a cry came from his lips, for he saw that the rear car was no longer attached to the train.

Climbing the ladder to the top of the car was a man, and this man he recognized as the fireman from the locomotive.

"Treachery!" grated Merriwell.

Immediately he turned toward the locomotive.

Bronson, the engineer, was leaning from the cab window.

"Stop!" shouted Frank. "Stop this train!"

The engineer glanced back at him, and laughed defiantly.

"I'm bound for Espita!" he shouted. "You told me not to stop for anything or anybody."

Jerking a pistol from its holster, Frank continued to lean out of the open door, while he leveled the weapon at the engineer.

"Stop, or I fire!" rang out his threat.

"Fire away!" flung back Bronson. "You couldn't hit me in an hour!"

Nevertheless, he promptly withdrew from the window.

"Phwat is it, Frank?" palpitated Mulloy.

Merriwell explained the situation, and his words created great excitement in the car.

"They've cut the pay-car loose," he said. "You all know what that means. They'll break it open and plunder it. Gallup will be murdered!"

"Well, av this ain't the divvil's own scrape!" muttered Mulloy. "Phwat are we going to do, Merry, me bhoy?"

"We've got to stop that infernal, treacherous engineer!"

"Will yez tell us how it can be done?"

Minutes were precious now, and Frank knew it. The engineer was driving the locomotive at the highest possible speed, regardless of all peril.

"There's only one way," Merry finally decided. "Somebody must get onto that engine and stop it."

"How can it be done?" questioned Barney.

"I'll try it," said Merry. "Get hold of me, two or three of you, and give me a lift. I'm going to try to climb onto the top of this car."

They followed his directions, two of them lifting him, while others held them to keep them from being jostled out of the open door. He clutched the edge of the roof, and they pushed him higher and higher in an effort to accomplish the task. The roof, however, was smooth and slightly sloping, and he could obtain no hold for his hands.

The engineer discovered what was taking place.

"Get down!" he yelled furiously. "If you don't, I'll drill you!"

A moment later a bullet whistled past Merriwell's head. Merry was not greatly disturbed, for he realized that it would be more by accident that anything else if Bronson succeeded in hitting him under such circumstances.

Finally he managed to pull one of his feet free from the men who were lifting him and drew a knee up over the edge of the car. They gave him a last boost, and he was upon the car.

In the meantime, Bronson had emptied his revolver, and he saw that Merriwell was determined to succeed. This being the case, he closed the throttle and applied the brakes. The train slowed down. Bronson swung down the steps and made a leap to the ground. He went sprawling, leaving the engine to reel onward over the rails.

A moment later Merriwell reached the window of the cab, kicked it open, and crept in.

The train came to a stop near one of the little box-like stations where there was a siding. The moment it stopped, the armed men leaped from the car.

"Phwat are we going to do now?" cried Casey. "The car with the money must be eight or tin miles back."

"Pull that coupling-pin, Mulloy," directed Frank. "We're going to drop this box car. Open the switch for me and let me run through."

Barney stood on the engine steps until the siding was reached. He had a supply of keys, and one of these opened the lock. Frank sent the engine onto the siding, Mulloy swinging up to the step as it reached him.

At the other end of the siding, Mulloy sprang down, and once more applied himself to the switch, after which Merry ran out onto the main line.

The armed guard was on hand.

"Are yez going to hook onto the car?" asked Barney.

"We can't stop for the car," said Merry. "Let every man possible get aboard the tender. Come on, Mulloy; I want you to shovel coal for me."

"Oi'm your fireman, Merry," said the Irish lad, as he rolled up his sleeves.

As swiftly as he dared, Frank pulled open the throttle, and the engine gathered speed with each passing second. Away they hummed over the rails, the armed men fingering their weapons and seeming ready for anything that might take place.

Only a few minutes were required in that run, but to Frank those minutes seemed hours. He held the throttle wide open as they swept round a sharp curve at hair-lifting speed. Suddenly they came into full view of the pay-car.

A shout went up from the men on the locomotive.

A dozen men were around that car, seeking to open the door with sledges and axes. Two or three were firing at the car, with the evident intention of intimidating the lone guard of the treasure, who was inside. A short distance away other men were guarding a number of horses.

This indicated that the attempted robbery had been well planned. While Frank Merriwell guarded the treasure through the night, The Wolf had been at work.

"Ready, ye tarriers!" shouted Mulloy, as he caught a glimpse of what was taking place.

The robbers seemed bewildered at the sight of the returning locomotive. They ceased their assault upon the car, and gave every evidence of confusion.

A tall, blond-mustached man sought to urge them on, but the appearance of those armed men packed on the tender of the locomotive proved too much for the rascals, and they made a rush for their horses. Even before the engine came to a full stop, those men were in the saddle and taking flight.

The treasure guard uttered a yell, and fired a scattering volley after them.

Frank sprang down, and rushed to the side of the pay-car.

"Gallup!" he called. "Are you all right?"

"Great thutteration!" came a voice from within. "Is that yeou, Frank? Dern my punkins if I ain't glad! What does all this racket mean? I was jest thinkin' I'd give about two thousand dollars if I was to hum on the farm."

* * * * *

Frank Merriwell took the recovered treasure through to Espita, where he found Watson Scott and three companions besieged in the little railroad station, with a clamorous mob of strikers outside. The door of the station was opened when Merriwell and his armed companions sprang to the platform.

"Howdy, do, Mr. Merriwell?" said Old Gripper. "You see I'm in trouble again. Can't seem to get clear of this rabble. The only thing that will pacify them is money, and that I haven't got just now. I'd give two dollars for every one I owe them, if I could pay them off."

"You don't have to pay a bonus for your own money," said Frank. "We've brought it in that car, and you can pay every man off as soon as they can walk up and get their coin."

THE END.

The Next Number (508) Will Contain

Frank Merriwell's "Flying Fear";

OR,

The Gray Ghost of the Yaqui.

Besieged at Espita—The Assault on the Window—The Rescue Train—Merriwell Proves Himself—Scott's Confidence—Merriwell Quiets Manzanillo—Two Pantherish Men—The Mysterious Flying Light—A Strange Reunion—The Camp on the Yaqui—The "Flying Fear"—The Attack on the Construction Crew—The Gray Ghost Appears in Time—The Fugitives—The Capture of Inza—Helpless in the Hands of The Wolf—The End of the Game.

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TIP TOP ROLL OF HONOR.

Following the suggestion of Mr. Burt L. Standish, that appeared in his letter to Tip Top readers in No. 480, the following loyal Tip Toppers have won for themselves a place on our Honor Roll for their efforts to increase the circulation of the King of Weeklies. Get in line boys and girls and strive to have your name at the head of the list.

William Alkire, 295 Laurel St., Bridgeton, N. J.
Z. T. Layfield, Jr., Montgomery, Ala.
J. G. Byrum, Chattanooga, Tenn.
Wm. Schwartz, New York City.
Edw. W. Pritner, Curesville, Pa.
H. D. Morgan, Indianapolis, Ind.
Wm. A. Cottrell, Honolulu, H. I.
J. (Pop) H., Birmingham, Ala.
Roy R. Ball, 902 Olive Street, Texarkana.
Fred F. Blake, 1512 E. 10 St., Kansas City, Mo.

The names of other enthusiastic Tip Toppers will be added from time to time. Send in the result of your efforts to push the circulation of your favorite weekly and win a place on the Roll of Honor.

APPLAUSE.

Owing to the number of letters received, the editors of Tip Top cannot undertake to secure their publication under six weeks. Those who contribute to this department must not expect to see them before that time.

I have read the Tip Top for a long time, though not steadily. I think it is the real book for young and old as well. I have read most other kinds of the five-cent books, but the Tip Top is ahead of them all. I say, let Burt L. put the characters just as he sees fit, and not have so many expressions of opinion on the subject.

I hope Dick and Brad will soon come back to Fardale and make old Chet Arlington's wool fly if he is still at Fardale. I just finished reading No. 492, and agree with Richard C. Daily.

Please send me your catalogue as soon as possible.

If any one can read the numbers where Frank was up in the mountains guarding his mines and dodging bad men, and then not like the Tip Top, I think he is a poor judge of reading matter. I would like to get all of the back numbers of the Tip Top, but that would be impossible, so I shall buy as many of the ten-cent books as I can.

I would like to have some of the readers write to me, and will try to answer all their letters.

Hoping this letter misses the waste-basket, and with three cheers and a tiger for Burt L. Standish, Street & Smith and the Tip Top, I remain, a true Tip Topper,
EUGENE HILLS.
 Clovis, Cal.

The golden West sends out a great number of appreciative letters from our young friends, and here is one from the California country so famous for its fine raisins.

After having read most of the Tip Tops, I have come to the conclusion that they are fit for a king to read.

Burt L. Standish is the greatest story-writer living. His character of Dick Merriwell is unsurpassed by any other character in print. In fact, his stories are wonderfully portrayed, his description of Dick's friends and enemies is perfect, and all his names fit his characters well. The publishers should feel proud of such a book. If I now was to stop reading Tip Top, I am sure that I should be troubled with insomnia and heartache.

My favorites are Frank and Buck, and Dick and Brad. I hope that Dick reaches Fardale right soon and plays football. I have two more wishes coming: That the Tip Top will never stop being published, and that other, that Dick will reach Fardale and oust Arlington.

I would like to get the Tip Top, from No. 1 up, to save. If I can, please let me know and I will order them. If you cannot supply the first few I wish you would let me know the numbers you can supply.

Well, as I am taking up too much space in your valuable Applause column, I will close, with three cheers for Burt L. Standish and Tip Top. I remain,
FRED F. PARSONS.
 Cleburne, Tex.

Tip Top is not only fit to be read by a king, but is read by several thousand kings every week. What greater king can read the Tip Top WEEKLY than "Young America"? Our future governors, Presidents, captains of industry and other great men read Tip Top. These are the kings who now are the readers of the ever-popular library. You can get any issue of Tip Top beginning with No. 312.

I have been a constant reader of your wonderful weekly for years, and must say words are inadequate to express my thanks for the great and only Tip Top WEEKLY, the best weekly of its kind published in the world. The Tip Top has been a blessing to me in more than one way. I had formed a habit of smoking "coffin tacks." But since using your wonderful remedy, which can be found in Tip Top WEEKLY, will-power, stick-to-it-iveness and other qualities too numerous to mention, I have been cured. Tip Top reader, be a man, mouse or a long-tailed rat. Tip Toppers, read the Tip Top, and follow in the footsteps of Frank and Dick Merriwell, and it will make a man of you. What we want in this world is more manly boys. The Tip Top teaches us what it takes to make a man. I can see the Merriwells as they pick up their worst enemy from the gutter, and with the arm of kindness they gently lead him along the road of life. They pass many cross-roads—weakness, drink, gambling, etc.—but at every road they direct him to the one that leads to the city of honor and prosperity. I am what you call a Tip Top beaver. I work for the Tip Top every opportunity I have. The other day, while I was deeply interested in Tip Top, a friend of mine said to me: "Why do you read such trash? Why don't you read good literature?" Right there we had war. I began with Frank's schooldays at Fardale and gave him the whole life of the Merriwells up to date. I could see him change as I drew to the end. Well, I landed another reader. I will now close, hoping this letter won't find that waste-basket. Wishing every one connected with dear old Tip Top a long and happy life, respectfully,
J. (Pop.) H.
 Birmingham, Ala.

You are a faithful worker and have succeeded admirably in convincing others that Tip Top is the only library for them to read. Having a good subject to talk about, we do not hesitate to say that your own eloquence must have helped a whole lot. We are pleased to add your name to the Roll of Honor.

Having been a reader of Tip Top for about eight years, I think it about time I was writing a little for the Applause column.

I like Frank and his crowd the best, and would like to hear more about them. I like Dick and his friends all right, but having read more about Frank, I cannot help being a little partial to him. I am getting a collection of post-cards, and would like to exchange with all Tip Top readers. Hoping to see this in print soon, I will close, with luck to Burt L. Standish and Street & Smith. Yours,

FRED F. BLAKE.

1512 East Tenth Street, Kansas City, Mo.

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RUFUS E. THOMAS.

3 Maple Street, Gloucester, Mass.

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I have used a good deal of your space, that is, if this misses the dreadful waste-basket, so won't impose on your kindness my first time. Give Brad, "that magnificent son of the Lone Star State," the best regards of his fellow Texan. With best wishes for Street & Smith and our able author, Burt L. Standish, I remain, a true Tip Topper,

ROY R. BALL.

Texarkana, Tex.

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Yours,

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D. S. B.

Watkins, N. Y.

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Well, I will tell who my favorite is—Frank. Hodge is all O. K. I like to see any one with good nerve, and he has plenty of that. Dick is all right, and what is wrong with Brad B., he is a little gassy; but he is there with the graps when he is needed. I like Cap'n Wiley all right, and old Joe Crowfoot. I would like to hear some more of him. Well, I will close. Best wishes to all true Tip Top readers and Burt L. S.,

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Coushatta, La.

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your book for three years, and rather read it than any other book in America. I have taken a great interest in TIP TOP, and have started over thirty other boys reading it. As for Dick and Brad, I will never forget them, and long for the day when they get back to Fardale. I opine there will be something doing with Mr. Chet Arlington when the unbranded maverick of the Pecos reaches Fardale.

I would like to hear more from Hammerwell, at Maplewood, and Cap'n Wiley. Hoping this will not reach the waste-basket, I am, a TIP TOP crank,
CLARENCE WHITE.
Greenville, Miss.

P. S.—I am visiting Denver, but read TIP TOP all the same.

There is always "something doing" in these stories. The interest never has a chance to flag. That is one of the reasons why TIP TOP has held its popularity for ten years.

TIP TOP is right. All other weeklies are away below it. I have one fault to find with TIP TOP: Dick has things too much his own way. His character is fine, though.

I have read every TIP TOP up to date. There are a number of young fellows in the neighborhood, and having had some talk about the king of weeklies, I soon convinced them it was the best. Having saved all the books from No. 1 to date, I started a TIP TOP club and donated my books. We have a membership of seventeen now, and meet every Friday. There are new members coming in all the time. Hoping TIP TOP will continue for another ten years, and wishing Burt L. and Street & Smith good luck, I close with, yours forever,
Chicago, Ill. ROY H. WILSON.

What pleasant times you must have when the club assembles to discuss TIP TOP affairs. It must be like one large family living in very happy relations. And you certainly have a good library in the early volumes of TIP TOP. May the club prosper and continue to add new members.

As I belong to the "Noble Order of the American Federation of Loafers," more commonly called hoboes, and as I have never seen a letter from one of my fellow members in your famous TIP TOP WEEKLY, I shall write a few words of thanks for the pleasure your great stories have given me. I have read them while seated on box cars and around camp-fires in thirty-eight out of the forty-five States. Many are the rainy days I passed away while in Georgia last winter seated in a box car reading TIP TOP WEEKLIES and eating chicken. No matter where I am I am always able to mooch the price of a TIP TOP, though I have sometimes felt the loving embrace of "John Law," and my subscription to TIP TOP stopped for a period of thirty days or more. As this is my first letter, I will close. My praise for TIP TOP is so great that if I were to write it I would have to have a blank book as big as a box car. With thanks to B. L. S. and S. & S., I am,
MASSACHUSETTS JESS.
East Long Meadows, Mass.

Our merry "knight of the road" is one of those happy-go-lucky souls who takes life easy, apparently on the plan that the world owes him a living. But for all your good nature, don't you find, after all, that it is pretty hard to collect the imaginary debt from the world? While we are glad you like TIP TOP and enjoy reading, we respectfully suggest, for your own good, that you "brace up," become a man and engage in some honest employment. There is a joy in earning one's own living and being independent which has a much more wholesome effect on the character than the supposed freedom of a tramp's life. Try it; and then let the TIP TOP readers know if you don't enjoy reading your favorite weekly when it has been bought with five cents you have earned yourself instead of a nickel "mooched" from some good-natured pedestrian. You cannot be one of the old-time readers of TIP TOP, for if you were you would have profited by the manly, self-respecting lives of our heroes. But it's not too late; turn over a new leaf now.

As one of the veteran readers of TIP TOP, and one of its most loyal followers and admirers, I again add my testimony to that of hundreds of other TIP Toppers. Mr. Standish certainly understands human nature in a remarkable degree to per-

mit of such vividness in character description. The power exists in but few to depict feelings and sentiments as that which he is able. He appeals to the American youth as, I believe, few writers of to-day are capable of doing. He reaches them in the true way by raising an example for them as a guide to true manhood. If all boy readers of the weekly would accept Frank Merriwell as a model, the coming generation would be composed of better men. The thought has only very recently been forced upon me, by personal experience, that example is the surest way of uplifting humanity. Human nature is hard to drive and hard to coax, but it can be led. And a boy addicted to bad habits will yield every one of them by following a good example, when it would be an impossibility to change him by any amount of pleading. There is one good thing which we cannot have too much of, and that is—good men and good citizens, and I, though a girl, can only thank the author we all admire when I realize the noble purpose of his life in giving us worthy examples toward the betterment and advancement of the American youth.

I wish every reader of TIP TOP might have had the pleasure of reading a personal write-up of Mr. Standish, which occupied about a column and a half in the Kansas City, Mo., *Star* and was printed about a year ago. It would have given all a better idea of the life and work of Mr. Standish, and would have given renewed interest in him—a closer, personal interest.

I am making a collection of souvenir postals—scenic view-cards—and will be grateful for all which readers will send me; and I promise to exchange. I am very anxious for foreign ones, also.

If I have not written too long a letter, I'd be very glad to have this printed, on account of the request for postals,
1104 Tyler Street, Topeka, Kan. EDITH M. ROOT.

A well-written letter is this. The sentiments are pleasing and expressed in a graceful manner. There is no doubt that the writer will receive a number of postal cards in exchange from readers all over the world. We hope that your album will soon be filled with a choice collection. Such a staunch admirer of the characters of TIP TOP, who is keenly alive to the good influence Frank's and Dick's conduct is having on the lives of our boy readers, deserves to be treated right royally by all TIP Toppers who agree with her.

As I have seen no letter from here, I decided to express a few opinions, hoping they will not find the waste-basket. I have just finished reading No. 492, and was as glad to hear from old Joe as Dick was to see him. In last week's Applause was a letter written by three Canadians. It is my opinion that they are of the same character as Heck Marsh, Chet, Clint Shaw and their crowd. Dear, noble Brad, how anyone can say anything against him is a puzzle to me. How many times he has shown himself to be, what any young man should be proud to be, brave, manly, noble. How I envy Nadia; but she is a fine girl and deserves such a lover. After Dick and Brad have gone through what they have, faced the dangers they have faced, they deserve a great deal of praise. In the late Applause, I quite agree with Wm. Nash; he expresses my opinions right to the dot. I like all the characters but Chet and his gang, because Chet was so persistent in his efforts to down Dick. They call it staying power, while I think it only goes to show him in his true character; he is nothing but a braggart. I hate him, but, although he has tried many ways, he could not, nor has not yet successfully, downed Dick. How I wish Brad could get at him, or that old Joe would "scalp him." Will correspond with anyone who wishes me to. Hoping to see this in print, I remain,
Colfax, Ia. A GIRL ADMIRER.

You express your likes and dislikes about the various characters so that there is no misunderstanding as to your sentiments.

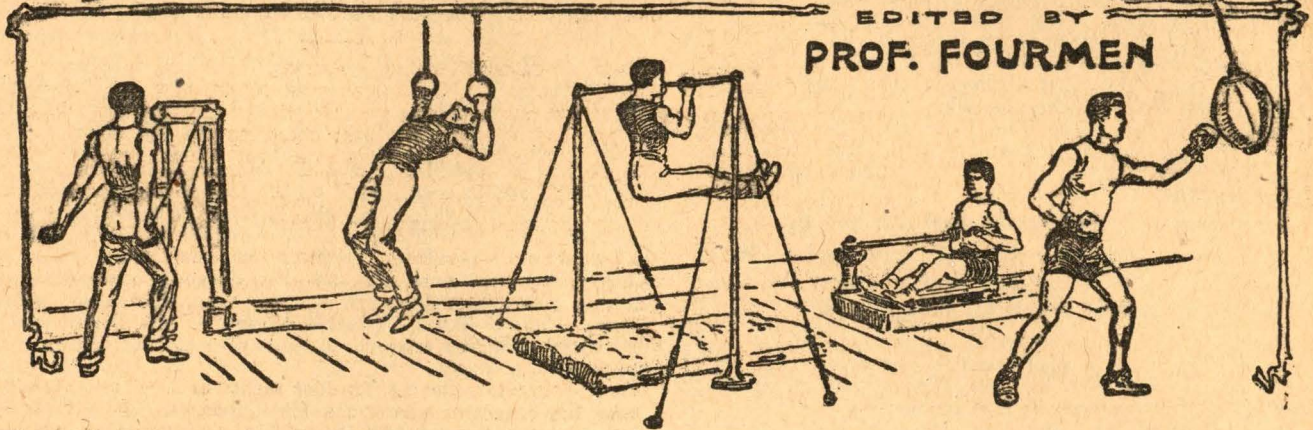
Being a constant reader of your excellent weekly, I take great pleasure in asking if it is possible for you to send me a complete catalogue of the TIP TOP WEEKLY. It is just the TIP TOP numbers and names that I want. Of course if you haven't got it, would you kindly send me the most complete catalogue you have, and I will be, a sincere friend,
208 Dallas Road, Victoria, B. C. C. B. HOLLAND.

We will mail you a catalogue of our publications.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

EDITED BY

PROF. FOURMEN



PROF. FOURMEN: I am 17 years old. My measurements are: Height, 5 feet 7 inches; weight, 124 pounds; neck, 14 inches; chest, normal, 33 inches; expanded, 36 inches; forearm, 9½ inches; wrists, 7 inches; reach, 69 inches; thighs, 17½ inches; calves, 12 inches; ankle, 8 inches. What are my weak points, and how can I develop them?

A CALIFORNIA BOY.

Los Angeles, Cal.

Exercise to take on more weight, as you lack a few pounds.

PROF. FOURMEN: Having read TIP TOP for a number of years, I now take the liberty to ask you a few questions. My age is 16 years 3 months. The following measurements were taken stripped: Chest, normal, 32 inches; deflated, 29½ inches; inflated, 35 inches; across shoulders, 18 inches; neck, 13 inches; around shoulders, 37½ inches; around hips, 32¼ inches; forearms, 9¾ inches; wrists, 6¾ inches; waist, 28 inches; thighs, 18½ inches; calves, 13¾ inches; ankles, 9 inches; height, in stocking feet, 5 feet 3¼ inches; weight, in street clothes, 108 pounds; biceps, normal, 8½ inches; expanded, 9¾ inches. 1. How are my measurements, and what are my weak and strong points? 2. What exercises should I take to make my weak points stronger? 3. Do you think I could become an all-round athlete? 4. What pound dumb-bells should I use? 5. I am playing football this fall and would like to weigh about one hundred and fifteen pounds. Do you think that would be too much, and what should I do to gain the required weight? Hoping this will miss the dreaded "wastebasket," I remain, a reader of TIP TOP,

Bradford City, Va.

You could weigh twenty pounds more to good advantage. Eat fat-producing food to gain the necessary increase in your build. Potatoes, beef, oatmeal, brown bread and plenty of fruit and vegetables should be eaten in well-mixed proportions. There is no reason why you couldn't become an all-around athlete if you work faithfully with that end in view. Take a general course in a well-equipped gymnasium, and after you find that there is one form of exercise you excel in, concentrate every effort upon that one thing. A two-pound dumb-bell is heavy enough for you to use.

PROF. FOURMEN: As I am a reader of TIP TOP, I take the liberty of asking you a few questions. Age, 15 years; weight, 125 pounds; height, 5 feet 6½ inches; neck, 11½ inches; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 34 inches; waist, 30 inches; calves, 13 inches; shoulders, 18 inches; thighs, 19 inches. 1. How are my measurements? 2. What are my weak points, and how can I enlarge them? 3. How does my height and weight compare? Am I too light? 4. How do I compare with the average boy of the same height and weight? 5. Is my chest large enough? Hoping to see this in an early TIP TOP, as it is my first letter, I remain, yours truly,

Pine Bluff, Ark.

You are underweight and your chest development could be an inch larger. You compare favorably with others of the same age, however.

PROF. FOURMEN: I would like to ask you a few questions. I am 14 years old; 5 feet 1 inch tall; weight, 105 pounds; across shoulders, 13 inches; chest, 30 inches; expanded, 32½ inches; right biceps, normal, 8½ inches; contracted, 10½ inches; left, normal, 7½ inches; contracted, 9½ inches; thighs, 18½ inches; arm, length, 24½ inches; right forearm, 9½ inches; left, 9 inches. 1. How are these measurements? 2. Which is the best exercise, football or baseball? I play end on a football team and pitch on a baseball team. I neither smoke cigarettes or drink coffee. I play tennis pretty much and also swim a great deal. I belong to a gymnasium and military company. Yours respectfully,

A TIP TOPPER NOW AND FOREVER.

Davenport, Ia.

You are very well built for a boy of your age. Both games are good, but in football the muscles of the body are exercised a great deal more than in baseball.

PROF. FOURMEN: Having read TIP TOP for some time, I naturally became interested in your athletic questions and answers columns, and would like to get a few pointers. I am 16 years 7 months old and weigh 140 pounds. I have not done any proper training for more than a year past, so I hereby submit my measurements: Height, 5 feet 8½ inches; chest, contracted, 34 inches; normal, 36 inches; inflated, 40 inches; waist, 30 inches; neck, 15 inches; across back of shoulders, 20 inches; thighs, 20 inches; calves, 15 inches; ankles, 11 inches; wrists, 7 inches; forearms, 10 inches; biceps, 10 inches; flexed, right, 12 inches; left, 11½ inches. 1. How are these measurements? 2. How can I develop my arms? 3. How can I decrease my waist? I play all outdoor games, but am not allowed to jump on account of weakening my kidneys. 4. How can I strengthen my kidneys? 5. In what way can I develop my wind to a greater extent? Truly yours,

Cleveland, Ohio.

A. WOOD BEATHLETE.

1. Very good.
2. Use pulley weights fifteen minutes a day.
3. Continued exercise in a gymnasium will take off flesh and reduce the size of your waist in proportion to the other parts of the body.
4. Take hip baths of tepid water and rub the small of the back with a coarse Turkish towel twice a day.
5. Punching-bag exercises and cross-country runs.

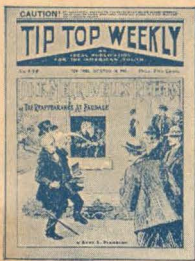
PROF. FOURMEN: I have played on a baseball team here all summer, and would like to become an athlete. Please tell me what you think of my measurements. Age, 21 years; height, 5 feet 4 inches; weight, 112 pounds; chest, 33 inches; neck, 13½ inches; waist, 29 inches. I would like to develop my body more, as I don't expect to grow any taller. What is the best exercise for this? How can I increase my weight?

Eau Claire, Wis.

A TIP TOPPER.

You are well proportioned and do not need any development or increase of weight. Take enough exercise to keep the body in a healthy state.

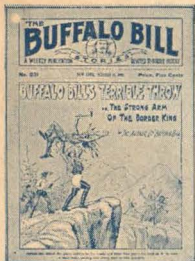
THE FAVORITE LIST OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES



TIP TOP WEEKLY

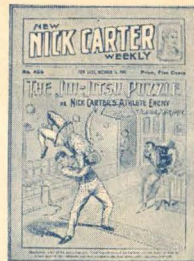
Frank and Dick Merriwell are two brothers whose adventures in college and on the athletic field are of intense interest to the American boy of to-day. They prove that a boy does not have to be a rowdy to have exciting sport.

Buffalo Bill Stories



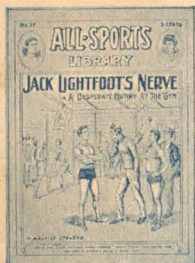
Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

Nick Carter Weekly



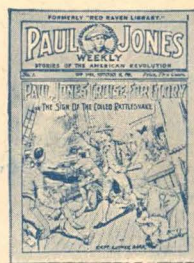
We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest sleuth that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful, power of fascination.

All-Sports Library



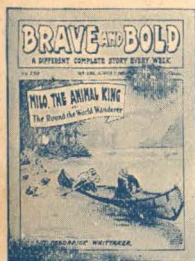
All sports that boys are interested in, are carefully dealt with in the All-Sports Library. The stories deal with the adventures of plucky lads while indulging in healthy pastimes.

Paul Jones Weekly



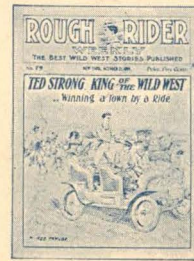
Do not think for a second, boys, that these stories are a lot of musty history, just sugar-coated. They are all new tales of exciting adventure on land and sea, in all of which boys of your own age took part.

Brave and Bold



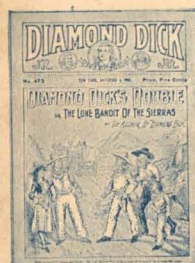
Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

Rough Rider Weekly



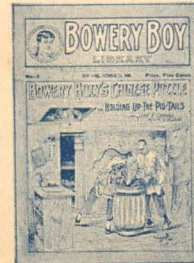
Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title.

Diamond Dick Weekly



The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

Bowery Boy Library



The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

TIP TOP WEEKLY

CAUTION!

All readers of the Renowned Tip Top stories should beware of base imitations, placed upon the market under catch names very similar to Frank Merriwell, and intended to deceive.

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| <p>463—Frank Merriwell Blizzard Bound; or, After Big Game in the Rockies.
464—Frank Merriwell Captured; or, Trouble in the Black Timbers.
465—Dick Merriwell in Damascus; or, The Sword of the Sheik.
466—Dick Merriwell on the Desert; or, Captives of the Bedouins.
467—Dick Merriwell in Egypt; or, The Encounter on the Nile.
468—Frank Merriwell's Fingers; or, The Man Who Came Back.
469—Frank Merriwell's Retaliation; or, The Clash in California.
470—Frank Merriwell in 'Frisco; or, The "Go" at the Golden Gate.
471—Frank Merriwell's "Dope Ball"; or, The Wizard Twirler of Leland Stanford.
472—Frank Merriwell's Handicap; or, Hastings, The Hurdler from Humboldt.
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499—Dick Merriwell's Defeat; or, How Arlington Won the Second Game.
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501—Dick Merriwell's Stride; or, The Finish of the Cross Country Run.
502—Dick Merriwell's Wing-Shift; or, The Great Thanksgiving Day Game.
503—Dick Merriwell's Skates; or, Playing Ice Hockey for Every Point.
504—Dick Merriwell's Four Fists; or, The Champion of the Chanson.
505—Dick Merriwell's Dashing Game; or, The Fast Five from Fairport.</p> |
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